

Friday December 27 1996

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Australia AU 1.100	Japan JP 1.100	Japan JP 1.100
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Belgium BF 1.100	Malaysia M 1.100	Malaysia M 1.100
Bulgaria LV 1.100	Malta M 1.100	Malta M 1.100
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The Guardian

Printed in London, Manchester, Frankfurt and Roubaix

INTERNATIONAL

NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR 46,747

Sport

Bowled over: Sorry England fall again in Zimbabwe

Happy return: Cole scores in comeback as United go third

Special 16-page sports section

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Fury as Major wins poll

Owen Bowcott

THE Conservative Party last night denied it had systematically rigged a BBC Radio telephone poll which ended in bitter political recriminations as John Major was elected Personality of the Year.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Michael Heseltine, stepped into the row to back the BBC's selection procedures by claiming Mr Major's victory was due to nothing more than the "enthusiasm of Conservative Party voters".

But senior Labour figures, and the independent pollster, Bob Worcester of MORI, denounced the outcome, alleging widespread vote-fixing.

Labour's campaign spokesman, Brian Wilson, said: "This is the least credible result since Father Ted [the Channel 4 sitcom priest] was given the golden priest award on Christmas Eve."

Mr Major's disputed victory will nonetheless bring succour to Conservatives who believe his easy-going personality is the only weapon they possess in the fight to win another term in office against overwhelming opinion poll odds.

The end of year poll — from which the Labour leader, Tony Blair, was banned before Christmas because of a leaked fax urging Labour supporters to call in on his behalf — also served to expose the parties' extreme sensitivity, giving a foretaste of how they may stoop to every trick of media manipulation in the coming general election.

The Boxing Day dispute was triggered by the BBC's revelation that it had disqualified 4,000 votes for Mr Major in the Today programme's annual poll on the grounds that they represented multiple voting by the same telephone number.

Amid a welter of claims and counter-accusations, the BBC confirmed that it would review its vote-checking procedures and may be forced to cancel future Personality of the Year competitions.

The adjusted result, announced yesterday, gave the Prime Minister 23.5 per cent. His nearest rival, the Wolverhampton nursery teacher, Lisa Potts, who defended her pupils from a machete attack, was supported by 21.5 per cent of callers. In third place was the Burmese opposition leader Aung San Sun Kyi, with 17.5 per cent.

Mr Major, who is spending the Christmas holiday with his family in Huntingdon, declined to appear on the programme. He is due to be interviewed on Today early in the new year.

Downing Street last night declined to comment on claims that it had asked the BBC to keep the disqualification of votes secret.

Denying the result was due to vote-rigging, Mr Heseltine said: "I don't think that is anything to do with the Conservative Party. It is the enthusiasm of Conservative supporters. But the fact is that John has won. Now why don't we just sit back and enjoy it?"

But Mr Worcester of MORI said the disqualification of so many votes was an admission that there had been an attempt to rig the result. "The Tory Party clearly has been rigging... otherwise they would not have disallowed 4,000 votes. Why 4,000? It's arbitrary," he told the BBC's World at One.

Labour greeted the result with practised incredulity. Tony Banks, MP for Newham North West, said: "The idea that John Major could end up being voted Personality of the Year is so ludicrous as to beggar belief. It just indicates that the Labour Party has got an awful lot to learn when it comes to rigging polls."

Telephone numbers recorded as voting two or three times were not automatically discounted, given that the average household contains several members. Only those found to have called in repeatedly were disqualified.

A BBC spokeswoman said: "It is sad if people make multiple votes because it attacks the integrity of our poll. We review the competition every year. It may not again, it may not."

Chilling out for charity



Gary Miller, left, and Gary Johnson braving the North Sea on Sunderland Lions' charity Boxing Day dip, which raised £18,600. PHOTOGRAPH OWEN HUMPHRIES

Nurses 'admit Saudi killing'

Luke Harding and Kathy Evans

THE two British nurses held on a murder charge in Saudi Arabia have confessed to killing their Australian colleague unintentionally, a leading Saudi-owned daily newspaper reported yesterday.

Quoting police sources, al-Hayat said Lucille McLaughlan and Deborah Parry admitted to senior Saudi investigating officers that they carried out the killing.

If their plea of manslaughter is accepted by an Islamic court the two women would escape being publicly beheaded. Under Sharia law a murder has to be premeditated to carry the death penalty.

Miss McLaughlan, aged 33, from Dundee, and Miss Parry, aged 41, from Birmingham, were formally charged on Christmas Eve with the murder of Yvonne Gilford, who was 53. The Australian nurse was stabbed five times, hit with a hammer and smothered in her room at King Fahd Military Medical College in Dhahran, where all three women worked.

Al-Hayat, based in London and one of the Arab world's most reputable newspapers, said the British women were caught using the dead nurse's credit cards on December 18, a week after the killing.

They were allegedly captured by security video cameras while going on a shopping spree. Saudi police had been monitoring the movements of all suspects, including the British nurses.

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Putting the spin on Cherie Booth

Assistant and minder appointed to help Labour leader's wife cope with election

Owen MacAuliffe, Chief Political Correspondent

WHEN is a spin-doctor for not a spin-doctor? The answer, when she is assistant or minder to Cherie Booth, wife of Labour leader Tony Blair, or so it seemed last night.

But the answer was proving difficult to swallow for some, especially when it turned out that Fiona Miller, the assistant or minder in question, was the long-time partner of Alastair Campbell, Mr Blair's spin-doctor par excellence.

It might seem inconceivable that Mr Campbell's partner should carry out a similar role for Mrs Blair as he does for Mr Blair. But both families have been friends since before Mr Campbell became his chief press secretary, back to when he was political editor of the Daily Mirror and Ms Miller was a lobby journalist on the Daily Express.

The real spin-doctor said: "She will be there as a friend. It is a non-job." Which is a dismissive tone to adopt towards your long-term partner and mother of your children.

But the spin-doctor was unrepentant as he went on to make a distinction between the work of a spin-doctor and Ms Miller's work.

Cherie did not want to meet the press but if she did, that would be dealt with by the press office, or spin-doctors.

Ironically, though Ms Miller and Cherie have walk-on roles, both are said to have been important influences in turning their respective partners to Labour politics.

Mr Blair was said to have only a hazy interest in politics until meeting Cherie, while Mr Campbell is believed to have been influenced by the strong socialist tradition in Miss Miller's family.



Cherie Booth... to get help with organisation but no spin



Fiona Miller... long-time friend appointed to 'non-job'

Banzai! The tag to snag the bonsai crime wave

Vivek Chandhary

ANYONE given a bonsai tree for Christmas this year is likely to encounter a few problems looking after it.

The ancient art of bonsai growing is difficult enough, but there is also a good chance that your tree might end up going for a walk.

There are reports of a bonsai crime wave costing thousands of pounds.

But fear not — bonsai enthusiast Martin Unwin has developed the latest gadget in the fight against bonsai crime — an electronic tag that helps owners track down their stolen miniature trees.

Using technology first developed to protect motorcycles, Mr Unwin's company, Bon-Tag, provides bonsai enthusiasts with kits to manufacture their own microchip transponders which can be injected into the tiny trunks of the trees.

If a tree is stolen and is then recovered by police, its ownership can be identified by running a hand-held scanner over it and revealing its unique serial number.

Mr Unwin, aged 37, from Bebbington, Wirral, said: "I have been studying bonsai since 1989, and I have always been keen on horticulture. I became aware of the need for better security after visiting a specialist nursery which had had a number of prize trees stolen."

According to Mr Unwin, a bonsai enthusiast himself, the transponders need no power sources, are hard working and last for decades, providing a life-long hidden security mechanism for collectors of the trees, which can be worth thousands of pounds.

The tracking kits can be purchased at specialist garden centres, through bonsai magazines and

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The Guardian Personality of the Year

The Guardian's own Personality of the Year offers readers the chance to redress the balance. Please register your choice by calling one of the numbers listed below. Vote early, spend less.

Poll closes at midnight December 30. Calls should cost no more than 10p. Results published on January 1, 1997.

- Neil Hamilton For services to the Labour Party 0800 250 987
- Jane Austen For services to ratings 0800 250 982
- Duchess of York For services to republicanism 0800 250 983
- Governor Davies For services to parliamentary democracy 0800 250 984
- Nail Jordan For services to republicanism 0800 250 985
- Kenneth Clarke For services to Europe 0800 250 986

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5	12	16	2	2				



Only Fools And Horses the most watched TV show as corporation has eight programmes in top 10 □ EastEnders tops soaps figures

BBC wins Christmas ratings battle

Andrew Cull
Media Correspondent

THE BBC romped to its traditional Christmas Day victory over ITV, with eight of the top 10 rated programmes.

Only Fools And Horses, the bookmakers' favourite, was the most watched show, attracting 18.7 million viewers, according to unofficial early estimates published yesterday.

BBC captured 53 per cent of the Christmas Day audience, compared with ITV's 26 per cent. The shares are almost identical to 1995, when BBC won a 54 to 26 per cent victory.

ITV, which dominates the ratings for 51 weeks a year, is used to coming off second best to the BBC at Christmas. The corporation invested £43 million in its two-week festive package for BBC1 and BBC2.

Even ITV's bankers — Coronation Street and Heartbeat — fared badly against the BBC's big hitters, including EastEnders and the terrestrial premiere of Steven Spielberg's Jurassic Park.

Television watching reached its height at 9.30pm on Christmas Day, when the audience for Only Fools and Horses peaked at 19.1 million.

A total of 28.8 million were watching the four terrestrial channels at the time.

Viewing figures were slightly down on Christmas 1995, the highest-rating programme last year was one of two editions of EastEnders, with 22.3 million.

Heartbeat, ITV's drama starring Nick Berry as a Yorkshire policeman, which normally attracts 15 million viewers, slipped to 11th place, with 7.9 million.

Some of the unofficial estimates will be increased when viewers who videoed programmes to watch later are included in the official figures to be published by the Broadcasters' Audience Research Board (BARB) in two weeks.

BBC's EastEnders won the soaps battle with 15.9 million against Coronation Street's disappointing 9.4 million. The Street was ITV's highest placed programme at number seven.

A BBC spokesman said: "We are glad viewers chose to spend so much of Christmas Day with the BBC."

ITV, heavily criticised three years ago by the Independent Television Commission for not trying hard enough over Christmas, had assembled a more promising line-up. It had linked the day together with a live global party from HMS Belfast, hosted by Andrea Turner.

An ITV spokeswoman said: "Christmas is the time when the BBC traditionally go for broke and transmit all their top-rating shows and major movies in order to dominate the ratings."

ITV's big movie, The Remains of the Day attracted 4.6 million, compared with Jurassic Park's 14.5 million.

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Rodney (Nicholas Lyndhurst) and Del Boy (David Jason) in fancy dress for the Christmas Day edition of Only Fools And Horses



Het Majesty... broadcast seen as a significant duty
Rory Bremner... timed to clash with Queen's message

Queen loses half of her viewers over six years

Andrew Cull

THE Queen has lost more than half of her Christmas Day viewers over the past six years.

This year's message, recorded at Sandringham, was watched by a total of 11 million BBC1 and ITV viewers, a drop of nearly 3 million in just 12 months.

The decline in interest in the message will dismay the Queen who has regarded the broadcast as one of her most significant duties of the year.

In 1991 it was watched by 23.3 million, having become firmly established as a 3pm post-Christmas lunch institution.

Her uncontroversial 1996 version, featuring footage of the state visits by President Mandela and President Chirac, was watched by 9.1 million viewers on BBC1 and 1.9 million on ITV, according to unofficial early estimates.

Five times as many watched on the BBC, pushing it into eighth place in the top 10 programmes, ahead of Noel Edmonds and Des O'Connor.

But last year 11.7 million watched on BBC1 and 2.2 million on ITV.

The decline in viewing has meant the National Grid has stopped preparing for a surge in electricity demand after the broadcast, as it does for other top-rated programmes.

The Queen faced competition from Channel 4, which cheekily scheduled its alternative message at 8pm, with impressionist Rory Bremner appearing as Diana, Princess of Wales, a figure conspicuous by her absence from the Queen's version. The show attracted 1.6 million viewers.

This year's message, which urged victims of tragedy to look forward with hope, was the last for two years to be produced by the BBC. For the next two years it will be made by ITV, although it will be broadcast on all channels as normal.

Buckingham Palace took the production away from the BBC in a move interpreted as retaliation for Panorama's 1995 interview with Princess Diana. That drew nearly 23 million viewers, almost equalling the Queen's 1991 performance.

The first Christmas Day radio broadcast was made in 1932 by George V. The first televised broadcast was in 1957.

The slide in the ratings does not take account of the extraordinary international popularity of the message, which is broadcast on the BBC World Service and throughout the Commonwealth.

TV viewing figures

Christmas Day 1996, millions

Only Fools and Horses (BBC1)	18.7
EastEnders (BBC1)	15.9
Jurassic Park (BBC1)	14.5
Vicar of Dibley (BBC1)	14.5
Radio's All-New Christmas Blossoms (BBC1)	13.0
Animal Hospital Goes West (BBC1)	9.5
Coronation Street (ITV)	9.4
The Queen (BBC1)	9.1
Noel's Christmas Presents (BBC1)	9.0
Des O'Connor's Christmas with the Stars (ITV)	8.2

Christmas Day 1995, millions

EastEnders II (BBC1)	22.3
EastEnders I (BBC1)	19.5
One Foot in the Grave (BBC1)	17.8
Coronation Street (ITV)	17.4
Keeping Up Appearances (BBC1)	16.7
Hook (BBC1)	12.5
Indecent Proposal (BBC1)	11.7
Noel's Christmas Presents (BBC1)	10.6
Auntie's New Blossoms (BBC1)	10.3
Only Fools and Horses (BBC1)	9.6

Register of police freemasons urged

Culture of secrecy encourages suspicions, says watchdog

Owen Bowcott

POLICE officers who are freemasons should be forced to record their membership in an open register to dispel suspicions about favouritism and divided loyalties, a public watchdog proposed yesterday.

The Police Complaints Authority warned that there was a relatively widespread belief that some officers were subject to masonic influences, although it uncovered no clear evidence of abuse.

The PCA's proposal — in a written submission to the Commons Home Affairs select committee — will add to growing pressure for both the police and senior lawyers to declare their membership of masonic lodges.

The select committee is conducting an inquiry into

the influence of freemasonry and investigating whether any restrictions on membership should be imposed on police officers, prosecutors, judges or magistrates.

The PCA report claimed there were numerous instances in which dissatisfied applicants alleged that their complaints were not properly investigated because they're all masons.

It said a statutory register of membership should eventually be established; in the meantime officers should be required to record their lodge affiliations on their force personnel files.

John Cartwright, the PCA's deputy chairman, told BBC Radio yesterday: "At least we are starting to dismantle this culture of secrecy which we think is harmful to the police service."

"We have the situation sometimes in quite serious in-

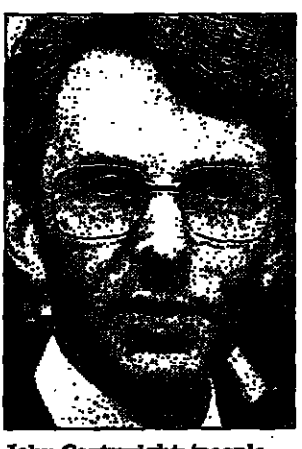
vestigations where we discover that senior police officers or middle-ranking police officers are members of the same masonic lodge as people who are suspected of quite serious criminal offences.

"There may be nothing wrong going on but certainly the public and critics put two and two together and jump to the wrong conclusion."

The PCA's move reinforces anxiety about the influence of freemasonry expressed by Scotland Yard and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). Earlier this year, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Paul Condon urged officers not to join lodges.

"I believe that if freemasonry was particularly strong in the police service in the past, it is not any more, Sir Paul said. "However, because of the public concern surrounding this issue I would advise my colleagues that it is better that they are not involved in freemasonry."

In October, ACPO suggested that members of the police service who were freemasons



John Cartwright: 'people jump to wrong conclusion'

should consider resigning from the brotherhood and that masonic membership should be compulsorily registered.

Both the recent revelation that Sir Frederick Crawford, chairman of the Criminal Cases Review Authority, was a leading freemason and

claims that the Dunblane mass-murderer Thomas Hamilton may have benefited from masonic connections have heightened public concern.

But resistance to the idea of a police register has been growing. The Police Federation, which represents 120,000 junior officers, has opposed the scheme, accusing chief constables of planning an "unwarranted interference" with the private lives of police officers.

Brian McKenzie, of the Superintendents' Association, suggested yesterday that any register should apply to the entire criminal justice system. "We would have no objection at all to compulsory registration of interest in such things as masonic lodges if other components of the criminal justice system — such as judges, Crown Prosecution Service lawyers and members of the PCA — also declared an interest," he suggested.

"They wield just as much power as police officers. Police officers feel there is an

attack on their integrity. We have got nothing to hide — but why single out police officers?"

Lord Justice Willett, a judge in the Chancery Division of the Court of Appeal who is also a freemason, yesterday denied that lawyers had ever been subject to undue influences because of their membership of the organisation.

"I have been a mason for 20 years before I became a judge," he declared on BBC Radio. "It didn't affect my practice at the bar and it doesn't affect my position on the bench."

The masonic oath, he added, was entirely compatible with the oath of a judge.

There are thought to be around 475,000 freemasons in almost 9,000 lodges in the United Kingdom. First established in this country in 1717, high-profile members include the Duke of Edinburgh, who joined the navy lodge in 1962, and the Duke of Kent who is the grand master and titular head of British freemasonry.

Policeman held in paedophile inquiry

A SENIOR police officer is among seven men arrested as part of an inquiry into a paedophile ring at a council-run leisure centre.

The inspector, a married father of two in his early 50s, has been freed on police bail. He has been suspended from duty while the Police Complaints Authority carries out an investigation into teenage prostitution at the centre.

South Wales police have confirmed that the officer was one of the seven arrested in connection with allegations of gross indecency at Aberdare Leisure Centre in Glastonbury.

The inspector is based at Merthyr Tydfil and has almost 30 years' police experience.

Detectives are interviewing a 15-year-old boy who, it is alleged, worked as a rent boy, using the leisure centre as a base. A 14-year-old boy is also being questioned.

The boys gave police a list

of seven names, all professional men in the South Wales area.

Officers made the arrests on Monday and the seven were held at separate police stations. The inspector was on his way to work when officers from his own force detained him.

Other detectives were waiting at Cardiff airport to arrest two of the men as they flew in from Amsterdam.

Three are from Aberdare, two from Merthyr Tydfil, one is from Swansea and one from Brecon.

A South Wales detective said: "These men are all highly regarded in the community. There is a health manager, and an architect involved."

South Wales Police spokeswoman said: "Their ages range from 35 to 59 and one man is a senior police officer within the force."

The men have been bailed until January 15.

STARTS SATURDAY AT PETER JONES - Blooms Square, JOHN LEWIS: OXFORD STREET, BRENT CROSS, ABERDEEN, CHEADLE, EDINBURGH, HIGH WYCOMBE. STARTS TUESDAY AT JOHN LEWIS: BRISTOL, KINGSTON, MILTON KEYNES, PETERBOROUGH, WELWYN. BAINBRIDGE - Newcastle, BONDS - Norwich, CALEYS - Windsor, COLE BROTHERS - Sheffield, HEELAS - Reading, JESSOP & SON - Nottingham, KNIGHT & LEE - Southsea, GEORGE HENRY LEE - Liverpool, TREWINS - Watford, ROBERT SAYLE - Cambridge, TYRRELL & GREEN - Southampton.

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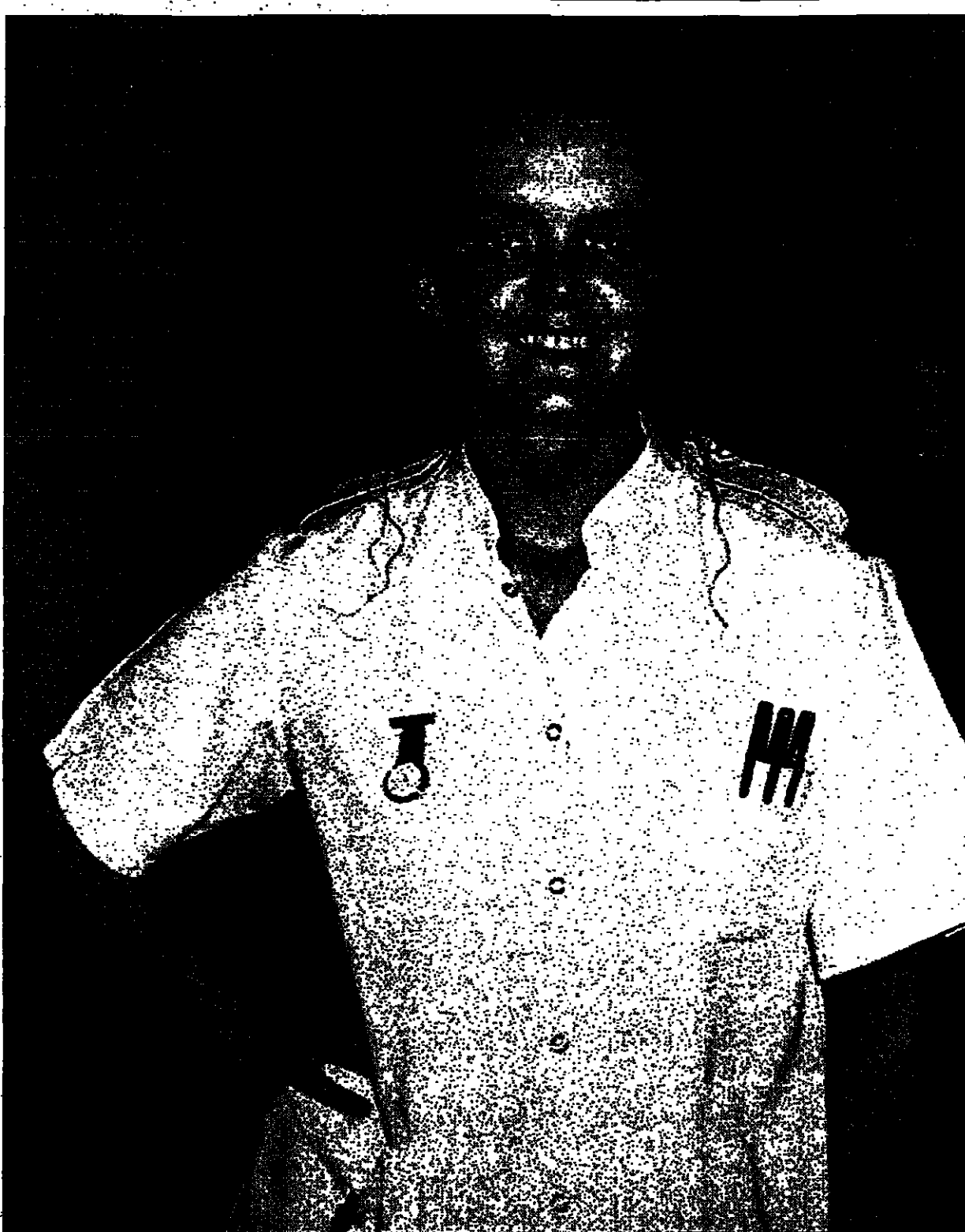
Yvonne Gilford, killed in her room in Dhahran

Nurses 'admit to Saudi killing'

Britons could escape execution if manslaughter plea accepted

continued from page 1
fight between the three nurses, but said they were good friends.
Foreign Office officials last night dismissed al-Hayat's claim the women had confessed as "speculation". A spokesman added yesterday: "The issue at the moment is making sure the women get legal representation. The consul went to visit them a few days ago."
"They are being held in good conditions. He arranged with them to pick up some belongings. What he is doing now is trying to sort out some

legal representation for them. He will continue to visit."
About 70 people have been beheaded in Saudi Arabia this year, none of them Europeans. Beheading is the form of execution most regularly used in murder cases.
Diplomatic sources say the Saudi regime is likely to be unmoved by representations from the international community and human rights groups if the British women are found guilty of premeditated murder. "You cannot compromise on the law of God," one diplomatic source said.



Lucille McLauchlan in Saudi Arabia. Her brother, John, said the murder charge was "very difficult to comprehend"

The victim's family would have to deny requests for clemency before a beheading could take place. This second requirement appears already to have been fulfilled. In a statement earlier this week Frank Gilford, the dead woman's brother, said the British women should suffer the same penalty as any Saudi. "Whoever did this did not give clemency to my sister," he said.
Miss McLauchlan's brother John, aged 28, of Dundee, said yesterday her family had been heartbroken by her arrest. "We are struggling to

handle what has happened to Lucille," he added. "It is very difficult for us to comprehend."
Her parents Stan and Ann intend to fly to Dhahran as soon as they are given permission to see their daughter. Dundee Teaching Hospital has revealed that a nurse called Lucille McLauchlan was dismissed in May 1996 for gross misconduct following a police investigation. But they say they cannot link their former employee with the woman held in Saudi Arabia.
Mr McLauchlan said his sister left of her own accord.

She went to Saudi Arabia in August.
Saudi Arabia's unbending Islamic justice system has long been criticised by human rights groups in the West. In Saudi criminal courts defence lawyers are not usually allowed to be present. Translation facilities are poor or non-existent. Defendants have to answer questions put to them directly by the prosecuting judge.
British embassy officials said yesterday that as yet no defence lawyers had yet been appointed by the two women. They are expected to be in jail

for a year at least before the investigation and trial is complete. If the victim's family then accepted pleas for clemency the way could be cleared for blood money to be paid to the victim's family for the loss of their relative. However, Saudi sources point out that the state would still have rights over the case in pursuing a death sentence or a term of imprisonment.
The women can expect a relatively swift first appearance in court. But the trial, two levels of appeal court, and a final petition to King Fahd could take many months.

Cunningham 'knifing' row

Shadow cabinet in-fighting over campaigning roles exposed

Ewen MacAskill, Chief Political Correspondent

POLITICAL in-fighting in the shadow cabinet broke into the open yesterday with a memo to discredit Jack Cunningham, the shadow national heritage secretary.
Mr Cunningham was bottom of a list, distributed by Labour leader Tony Blair, showing the number of days that each shadow cabinet member had spent campaigning. According to sources close to the shadow cabinet, Mr Cunningham notched up only three days this year.
The leaking of the information is part of the jockeying for position in the shadow cabinet as members fight for a place in a Labour cabinet.
Mr Cunningham is unpopular with some MPs because of the high profile roles he has been given, especially in the last two election campaigns.

Mr Cunningham's allies, who are angry at what they see as an attempt to ambush him, dismissed the memo as inaccurate and out of date, claiming it only reflected campaign days organised through Labour's campaigns office. It did not take account of the many trips Mr Cunningham had undertaken on his own.
One of his friends said: "I can't believe this. I know he has done more than that. He was out last week. Someone has tried to knife him in the back."
Another friend added: "The campaigns office has often changed the schedule at 24 hours' notice and he has not gone, but instead he has made his own arrangements."
The league table in the memo was topped by John Prescott, the deputy leader. The number of days spent campaigning round the country for most of the shadow cabinet is believed to



Jack Cunningham: 'attempt made to discredit him'

have ranged from around 10 to more than 30.
Some front-benchers are convinced Mr Blair will not be able to find places at the cabinet table for every member of the shadow cabinet.
But Mr Blair's office was adamant that the present shadow cabinet members had nothing to fear: "We are committed to abiding by the PLP

rules." Under Parliamentary Labour Party rules, every elected member of the shadow cabinet has to be given a cabinet job during Labour's first year in government.
There was no discussion when Mr Blair circulated the memo at the December 11 shadow cabinet meeting, though one member said in a stage whisper: "Now we know what everyone has been doing."
But Mr Blair included in the memo a plea for more campaigning in 1997 and shadow cabinet members have already responded, offering themselves for visits to constituencies throughout the country.
Mr Cunningham, in spite of the attempt to discredit him, again appears destined for high office. He has been mentioned in the last month as a possible Northern Ireland Secretary. Unionist sources hinted they would prefer him to the shadow Northern Ireland secretary, Mo Mowlam, because he is in the same mould as Roy Mason, one of the toughest Northern Ireland secretaries in dealing with terrorists.

Marchers defiant as Milosevic cracks down

Julian Borger, East Europe Correspondent

THOUSANDS of Serbian riot police were deployed on the streets of Belgrade yesterday as President Slobodan Milosevic resorted to force to stamp out a campaign of daily demonstrations against government election rigging. But opposition leaders vowed the protests would go on.
Heavily armed police — some with sniper rifles — prevented protesters from gathering in the central square, from where they have marched every day since the authorities annulled opposition wins in municipal elections on November 17.
The interior ministry issued a statement on Wednesday banning any demonstrations that hindered traffic in Belgrade. A midday march by about 10,000 students was allowed to proceed, but the police clearly had orders to stop the regular march by Belgrade residents in support of the opposition Zajedno (Together) coalition.

The helmeted, blue-uniformed police surrounded the central square and hustled Zajedno supporters into a pedestrian precinct. They butted those who resisted with their shields and hit them with batons. The crowd of about 30,000 had dispersed by evening.
Vuk Draskovic, an opposition leader, appealed for calm: "We have reliable information that the centre of terrorism wants to trigger major clashes, hoping that at least a policeman would be killed, so they can order an all-out attack against us."
Zajedno officials said they feared authorities planned to arrest their leadership. Zoran Djindjic, another leader, asked supporters: "Can you imagine a country in which, after losing local elections, its president tries to provoke a civil war? Can you imagine what he would do if he lost a presidential election — provoke a world war?"
Mr Djindjic added: "We will

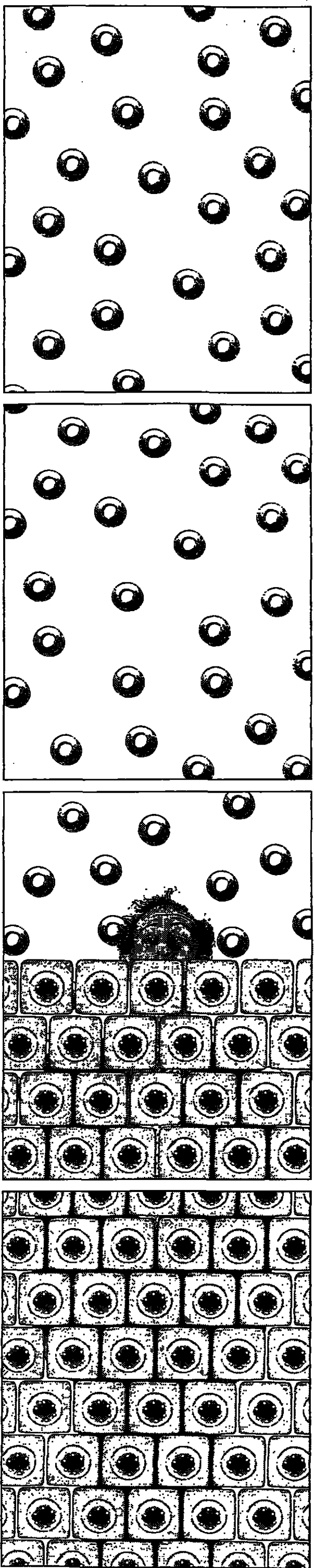
Wintry blast set to continue as icy roads bring deaths and injuries

MANY parts of Britain were expected to remain below freezing today, creating treacherous conditions for motorists with rain, sleet and snow in southern counties.
The Meteorological Office said that after overnight temperatures down to -4°C (-24°F), today's highest temperatures will be found in Scotland and Northern Ireland, at 5°C (41°F) and 6°C (43°F).

Elsewhere the maximum temperature will be 3°C (37°F).
There were a spate of fatal accidents across the country yesterday, as thousands headed for the sales and sporting events.
Two women died in an accident on the Cambridge-shire-Bedfordshire border which closed the A428 for several hours. A woman passenger died after two cars collided in Peterbor-

ough early yesterday. The A3 was at a standstill as drivers made their way to the Kempton race and traffic around football stadiums all over the country was heavy.
Lynne Biggs, 35, of Cambridge, died on the A1 near Grantham, Leics, as she travelled with her two daughters to visit relatives in Whitby Bay, Northumbria, on Christmas morning. Police believe she was

caught out by a sudden rain shower which turned to ice. The girls, aged six and four, were not badly hurt.
The bookies were yesterday counting up just how much they lost as a result of the brief Christmas Day snowfalls.
They could face a six-figure payout as many places around the country had their first proper white Christmas for more than 20 years.



What price peace, if it can never be voted for? Peace does not just happen. It requires concessions at the top and the living of it down below.
Peter Preston, page 11

HEAL'S
WINTER SALE
STARTS TODAY
TOTTENHAM CRT RD W1
KINGS RD SW3
TUNSGATE GUILDFORD

Household names revel in Christmas stage farce

Old and new stars flourish on panto scene

Dan Glaister on the heroes and villains hamming it up for a Yuletide tradition

TWO Mr Blobbys, two Sooties and almost 50 Tommy the White Power Rangers... yes, it's panto time again, as the forgotten stars of stage and screen rouse themselves for several well-paid weeks' work in theatres around the country.

But which is the real Mr Blobby? There's one at the Grimsby Auditorium in a production of Cinderella, while another can be found at the Mayflower, Southampton, in its version of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Meanwhile Sooty pops up at the Bloomsbury Theatre in London and at the White Rock, Hastings, in Aladdin. But panto is about seeing real flesh and blood stars close up. Household names can be found donning tights and slapping thighs around the country.

The title of burlesque dame must go to Frank Bruno, stepping out at the Alhambra, Bradford, in Jack and the Beanstalk. Jim Davidson does Dick Whittington in Bristol, and Paul Daniels also does Dick Whittington in Bournemouth.

Part of the pantomime season's joy is the potential it offers for the question "Where are they now?" Hi De Hi star Su Pollard appears in Cardiff, and Derek Nimmo can be found at Bath in Cinderella. Alvin Stardust, the 1970s pop star, a stalwart of the panto scene, is in Babes in the Wood in Hull, while a pop star from an even earlier era, Freddie Garrity, formerly of Freddie and the

Dreamers, is at Northampton, in Jack and the Beanstalk.

Other contenders for the "Didn't you use to be...?" category include Lorraine Chase, appearing in Croydon, David Essex in Edinburgh, and Wayne Sleep in Poole. Sheffield hosts the combination of Danny La Rue and Les Dennis, while Richmond has Bonnie Langford and another veteran dame, Bernard Cribbins.

The more natural pairings of Little and Large, and Canon and Ball can be found at Swansea and Newcastle respectively.

It is a good year for Gladiators, with Ja Blesed appearing alongside Brian Blessed in Peter Pan in Tunbridge Wells. Wolf takes up position alongside Alvin Stardust in Babes in the Wood, and Hunter was last seen heading for Aladdin at Southampton.

Every panto needs its villain, however, and this year's panto pooper has to be Philip Hedley, director of the Theatre Royal, Stratford East. Mr Hedley (boo! hiss!) argues the tradition of pantomime has been betrayed by the development of what one critic has called "soapanto".

"I do think the pantomime is an enormously important part of British theatre and I hate it when it is treated with disrespect," said Mr Hedley, whose production of Beauty and the Beast is determinedly star-free.

"The pantomime is a Christmas tradition that overrides stars. We don't need them."



Dame is the spur... John Inman prepares for his role in Cinderella at the Mayflower in Southampton. The panto also stars Britt Ekland and Lionel Blair. PHOTOGRAPH: MARTIN GOODWIN

Prestige performers



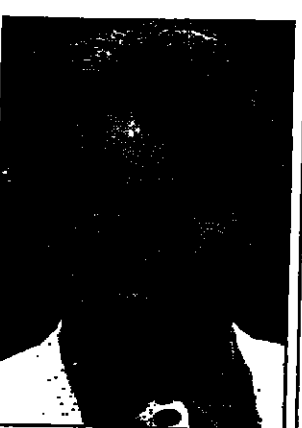
Frank Bruno in Jack and the Beanstalk



Su Pollard in Jack and the Beanstalk



Lorraine Chase in Jack and the Beanstalk



Jim Davidson in Dick Whittington



Paul Daniels in Dick Whittington



Bonnie Langford in Aladdin

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Radio One DJ in hospital after attack

John Duncan in Havana

ANNIE Nightingale, Britain's first woman disc jockey, was recovering in hospital yesterday after being mugged and beaten by three youths as she returned home from a night out in Havana where she was researching a programme about Cuban music.

Ms Nightingale, aged 54, was attacked at 1am in the centre of Havana by a gang, two of whom were on bicycles who tried to snatch her bag. As she resisted, she was kicked and beaten leaving her with a broken hip joint and bruises to her face and arm. She had a three-hour operation on Christmas Eve. She will return to England on December 31, though Cuban doctors say she will be unable to walk for at least two months.

The Radio One DJ said yesterday: "We were getting back to a friend's house and I saw this guy standing on the corner looking suspicious but we walked past him. There had been two guys on bicycles circling us but I didn't think anything of it. Then it happened. It was so unexpected and so vicious. I felt the bag being grabbed, torn off my shoulder and I, stupidly per-



Annie Nightingale, who is recovering after a beating by muggers left her with a broken hip joint and bruising

haps, resisted so one of them grabbed me by the arm and twisted me round. "I felt this blow and the next thing I am on the ground. I realised straight away that something was horribly wrong. I tried to stand up but I felt this horrible grating sound."

It was four hours before Ms Nightingale, who has travelled extensively to dangerous areas such as Iraq, Iran and the Andes without incident, was treated. "My friends tried to get me out of there in a car but I couldn't even be slid on to the back seat I was in so much pain.

Eventually we got to one hospital which was horrible. They tried to put me on a stretcher but being moved at all was unbelievably painful. Then they just left me. I was in a terrible state."

Eventually Ms Nightingale was transferred to the Cira Garcia, a modern dollar-only hospital used by foreigners and diplomats. She was told she needed an immediate operation. "The doctor said there was a danger of thrombosis if I didn't," she said. "It's all such a pity because I was having a great time, but I suppose things like this can happen anywhere."

Tuition enabled 5,000 six-year-olds to catch up

Axed reading plan 'shown to work'

Donald MacLeod
Education Correspondent

A CHILDREN'S reading programme axed by the Government last year is proving increasingly effective in the schools that have kept it going, researchers have found. Reading Recovery, imported from New Zealand four years ago, helped nearly 5,000 six-year-olds during the last school year, according to a forthcoming report from London university's Institute of Education.

The Government withdrew funding after a three-year pilot programme costing £14 million, leaving local authorities to support its continuation. Twenty-eight are doing so, with two in Northern Ireland taking it on this year.

Supporters argue that Reading Recovery is cost effective, cutting out expensive remedial help later on and preventing failure at school. It would tackle "the long tail of under-achievement" in English classrooms, they say.

But as an alternative, Gillian Shephard, the Education Secretary, this year set up 14 literacy centres in England at a cost of £12.5 million over five years to train teachers in reading methods, including phonics. Angela Hobsbaum, a researcher at the Institute, said Reading Recovery programmes were getting shorter as teachers became more

effective. The programme helped the weakest six-year-olds, who after a year at school knew fewer than half the alphabet and could write only four or five words. Without expert help they would fall further behind, she said.

Improving literacy was not cheap, but the £1,200 for Reading Recovery compared favourably with an estimated £300 a year for five years of remedial help at primary school. "Other forms of in-school support have not been shown to be beneficial," Ms Hobsbaum added.

"After a brief, intensive and effective programme, the children can keep up with their classmates. No further specialised tuition is required." Parents said their children were happier and more confident after Reading Recovery tuition, she said.

Schoolbook shortage 'lowering standards'

Donald MacLeod

MORE than 6,500 schools in England had shortages of books or equipment that were damaging children's education, the Office for Standards in Education has revealed. In a letter to David Blunkett, shadow education secretary, Chris Woodhead, Chief Inspector of Schools, said 18 per cent of primary schools

and 23 per cent of secondaries had book shortages which had adversely affected the standards of lessons.

Labour calculates that this would mean a total of 3,242 schools had book shortages and 2,325 had equipment shortages. Of these, 1,402 were short of both books and equipment.

Estelle Morris, a Labour education spokeswoman, said yesterday that parents were already having to subsidise

books and equipment for their children.

The figures showed "the reality behind the Government's rhetoric". She accused it of performing "a sleight of hand" in next year's budget for schools.

The increased assessment of schools spending promised in the Budget "does not translate into an equivalent increase in grant for local education authorities and schools", she said.

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Diplomats attacked in Scott Report will not be prosecuted

Richard Norton-Taylor

A GROUP of senior diplomats and customs officers whose conduct in an arms-to-Iraq trial was severely criticised by judges will not be prosecuted because key Middle East witnesses have declined to co-operate, it has emerged.

The Whitehall officials were attacked for persuading staff at the Iraqi and Jordanian embassies in London not to give evidence for the defence in the trial in 1985 of Reginald Dunk, director of Atlantic Commercial, an arms trading company, and Alexander Schlesinger, a consultant.

The two men pleaded guilty to trying to sell 200 Sterling submachine-guns to Iraq via Jordan in breach of export control. They were fined a total of £24,000 but the convictions were later quashed.

The Crown Prosecution Service confirmed yesterday it had decided "there was not sufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction" for the prosecution of the officials.

It would not comment further. However, the Guardian has learned that Scotland Yard was unable to obtain adequate evidence from either the Iraqis or - more surprisingly perhaps - given Britain's friendly relations with Jordan - from the Jordanian embassy about the role of their diplomatic staff during the Dunk affair. A police report on the affair was sent to the CPS earlier this month.

The British officials, named in the Scott Report and in a 1994 Court of Appeal judg-



Patrick Nixon, High Commissioner to Zambia

ment quashing the convictions, are Graham Boyce, Britain's ambassador in Kuwait, Patrick Nixon, High Commissioner to Zambia, and Charles Pigott, deputy head of the British embassy in Addis Ababa, and two senior customs officers, Mike Knox and John Cassey.

Sir Richard Scott described the conduct of the Foreign Office officials as "thoroughly reprehensible". The actions of the customs officers were "deserving of greater censure". Lord Taylor, then Lord Chief Justice, told the Court of Appeal when the convictions were quashed: "In our judgment, the machinations in this case to prevent witnesses for the defence being available, coupled with the non-disclosure of what had been done, constituted such an interference with the justice process as to amount to an abuse of it."

Trials show CS spray can contaminate police users

Alex Travis
Home Affairs Editor

POLICE officers can expect to be contaminated once every six months by their CS sprays, according to Home Office research.

But the results of official trials on the new "incapacitants" show they are much less likely to cause injuries needing medical treatment than the US-style batons now being used by the police.

Surveys for the Home Office found that two thirds of the public backed the issue of CS spray to police officers. However, more were opposed to the spray than were against the baton. Most of those opposed were worried that the spray was not a safe deterrent.

Although the trials provided no evidence that CS spray causes serious injuries, they did identify problems for police using it. Those affected typically complained of pain or discomfort to the eyes and a burning sensation on the skin. One in 10 complained of breathing difficulties. The trials showed that the

average officer would use his spray four or five times a year, either to deal with public disorder or a domestic dispute. In trial areas, the spray was used more frequently than the baton.

The researchers, however, found "frequent cross-contamination" with spray use, with officers affected about twice a year on average and some much more frequently.

Some officers drove their vehicles after being affected by their sprays, raising "questions of safety".

The researchers said officers believed all police should be issued with spray, which they saw as a lesser use of force than a baton. They also raised concerns over training. Most officers were trained to shout a warning before using the spray, and this was often enough to control the situation. However, officers in several unnamed forces did not get this training, and "there are occasions when CS is sprayed where a verbal warning may have made this unnecessary".

Police Research Group on CS trials; Home Office, Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1.

مكتبة الامم المتحدة

Ronnie Scott

In the house of jazz

THE customers at Ronnie Scott's Soho jazz club knew him as a laconic, wise-cracking, chain-smoking loner in a leather jacket, the very model of a modern jazz musician. He would announce the arrival of performers like Coleman Hawkins and Dizzy Gillespie in an exasperated, gravelly East London drawl, as if their presence on his premises were somehow interrupting some absorbing private pursuit, like watching the racing in the back room.

But another image of Ronnie Scott, who has died aged 68, emerged with familiarity and time. It was of a complex, romantic, erudite and sometimes obsessive perfectionist of immense intuitive musicality, consuming love for the lissom spontaneity and offhand virtuosity of jazz, and an unpredictably anarchic wit worlds away from the steadily recycled and sometimes rather dubious stand-up routine he used as the front-man in "the office".

Scott presented himself publicly as a man nothing touched. There was one resounding exception, his respect and admiration for fellow jazz-players, in celebration of whose achievements he set up his club, and whose work he cherished in his own way. He insisted on respectful attention from audiences, meticulously name-checking every member of a guest band, whether famous or not.

Scott knew that jazz at its best was about the unique perceptions of improvising performers, a collective impact dependent both on stars and on the most unobtrusive of accompanists — not about interpretation of one artist's composition, for the most part cast in stone. He once called jazz "a music of fleeting emotions", but their very transitoriness was the quality he loved. A deeply emotional man himself, but one who concealed his feelings from almost everyone (and frequently from himself), Scott perhaps heard in the elegant, evaporating symmetries of jazz an urgent tension between the perfect and the ephemerally mortal, a chord that lay deep within him. Most jazz-lovers have heard a whisper of something like it.

Scott was himself a fine saxophone player, respected for his rounded, faintly dolorous sound and improvising fluency by the best on the world stage, but it was the club that made his name internationally. The mix of upmarket supper-club intimacy and tatty low-life bohemia combined the priorities of Scott and his long-time friend, former saxophone partner and business associate Pete King, but neither man arrived at the chemistry by calculation or market research. Scott's yardstick was simply the kind of



Moves and grooves... Scott takes on Dizzy Gillespie at chess

place he would be happy to be occupying himself, with the emphasis on creating an environment that suited musicians, and which was devoted to appreciative listening (curt instructions to listen and not talk were issued on the tables, at Scott's behest). The inspiration for the atmosphere came from the 62nd Street New York jazz scene of the young Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis that Scott had visited in the forties and fifties (as an itinerant musician playing Atlantic liners), and from British surrealist comedy too. The mixture made the club unique.

At the centre of the universe to the women in his world, his mother Cissie and his grandmother Becky. He took up the saxophone as a teenager, was taught by Vera Lynn's uncle, Jack Lewis, learned precociously fast, and began sitting in at Soho clubs from the age of 18.

Two years later, at the end of the war, Scott was hired by Ted Heath, leader of the best-known and most prosperous British dance orchestra of the day. Scott was eventually fired by Heath for missing a gig, but the real reason had been his enthusiasm for introducing the fierce and newly-minted

back burner for much of the fifties when Scott became a successful bandleader, co-leading one of the most impressive of all early British big ensembles, the Jazz Couriers, with fellow-saxophonist Tubby Hayes. But in 1959 he opened the first jazz club to bear his name, a basement in Chinatown's Gerrard Street. Union rules had mostly prohibited American players working London clubs, and to begin with the booking policy was almost entirely local. But King, as business manager, persisted in negotiating with the American musicians' union who began to loosen the regulations, and when the British rock boom of the sixties made UK players a draw he had the chance of an equal exchange finally threw open the door.

During the sixties, an extraordinary procession of jazz heroes and heroines crossed the battered stage at 39 Gerrard Street. Among them Stan Getz, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Zoot Sims, Coleman Hawkins, Ben Webster, Bill Evans, Dizzy Gillespie, virtually all of the jazz stars of the day save Miles Davis, who was never to play a season at the Ronnie Scott club. Scott used to refer obliquely to Davis's intractability with the announcement: "That was a time by the great trumpeter Miles Davis, who once said to me... 'get out of the way!'"

For British jazz musicians, struggling to get to the essence of an idiom imported from another culture, the regular appearances of the best improvisers in the world began a process of evolution that truly helped set the UK jazz world on its own feet. Scott would often sit at a side-table near the stage, watching and listening as carefully and respectfully as any non-playing member of his audience.

And, sometimes (though deep anxieties about his unworthiness as a saxophonist would usually prevent him) he would jam with the stars as well. It may have been a nightclub front-man that Scott got really big, but respect for his musicianship was one of the elements that took him there.

The club expanded in the sixties, to the present Frith Street premises. It weathered the eclipse of jazz in that decade, it prospered in its return to favour over the past 10 years, and it teetered on the edge of bankruptcy in between. In the eighties, an unlikely link with the Cuban scene was forged, and Cuban jazz stars began to perform regularly at Frith Street. A second club opened in Birmingham in 1991. Scott's restless interior life hardly ever surfaced in that public place. He had several long relationships (two of which produced a son, Nicholas, and a daughter, Rebecca) but he felt that the "family" represented by the inner sanctum of his club

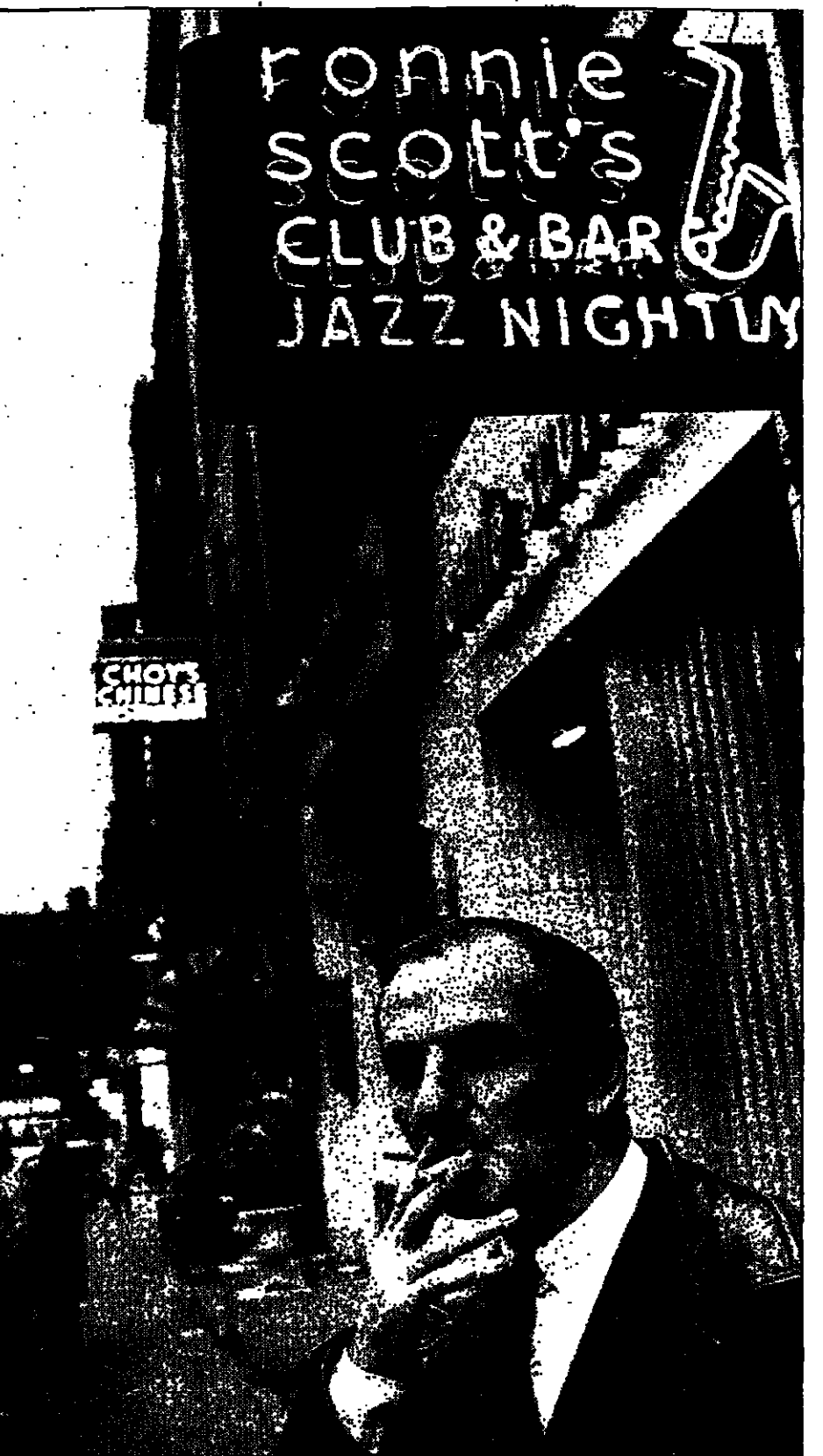
was his most natural circle, a perspective he built into one of his gags: "I love this club. It's just like home — filthy and full of strangers."

He could be dismissive, intimidating and self-preoccupied, and he could be generous, playful, and disarmingly modest. He could also bring the two sides engagingly together, as he did in recounting the story of a psychiatrist he once attended who fell asleep during his consultation. Scott appeared to regard shrinks like agents, attempting to represent particularly inept musicians, who are forced to listen, as he put it, to "hard luck stories" all day.

HE LOVED jazz, and he loved opera, chess, and just about any sport (though purely from a reclining position). When the 30th birthday of the club was celebrated in 1989, Scott evoked sentimental reflections and took refuge in the quip: "It's like a prison sentence. Thirty years in a jazz club." He had to be reminded of the remarkable role the place had played in the development of British jazz, and both he and King (a unique partnership even by the quirky professional standards of Soho nightlife) would contend that the drop-dead fortune that had kept the club afloat only existed because they didn't know what else to do. Currently, the club is doing as well as it ever has, despite Scott himself being off the premises for most of the past year with health difficulties, including the dental problems that stopped him playing in 1995. London's best jazz, still steered by Pete King, will probably redouble his efforts to celebrate his memory and the music that drove him.

John Dankworth once said that Ronnie Scott's had shown that a Soho nightclub could also be "a recital hall, a concert hall, a place of learning". Scott had also told this writer that it had been a chance for the public, listening to the greatest jazz stars, "to see that they were human, that they were wonderful, and that sometimes they fuck up like everybody else". It was a chance that transformed the lives of many people, inside and outside the music business, and for which Ronnie Scott may never be forgotten.

John Fordham
Val Wisner writes: It wasn't easy being a woman jazz fan in 1960, but as soon as Ronnie realised I was sincere about the music and not just a "chick on the scene", the club became my home from home. From the days when it was just two rows of wooden chairs facing the bandstand, he let me in there free to take photographs, and vacated the



Clubbable... Scott in 1966 shortly after the "world's best jazz club" moved across Soho from Gerrard Street to Frith Street

cubby-hole office under the stairs for me to interview visiting artists, among them expatriate British vibraphonist Victor Feldman and Jamaican saxophonist Harold McNair. When he himself spoke to me early on for Jazz Journal, Ronnie, who always employed black staff at the club, enlightened me to the role in British jazz modernism that local black people had played. He also revealed an unexpected penchant for accuracy by insisting on correcting and subbing my copy.

The Jimi Hendrix jam with Rahsaan Roland Kirk at Frith Street is an often-told story, but I remember even earlier magical nights: a Gerrard Street session that paired saxophonists Sonny Stitt and Ronnie with guitarist Ernest

Langlin and fellow Jamaican Roy Burrows, here playing trumpet with Ray Charles; the debut of Charlie McGregor's big band, forerunner of the Brotherhood of Breath. And there was the night I took bluesmen Memphis Slim and Big Joe Turner to sit in with saxophonist Ben Webster, and Gerry Mulligan joined in on baritone, all cheered on by a crowd of black exiles that included gospel singer Madeline Bell, the Manhattan Brothers and other South Africans from the musical King Kong. On such nights you would swear that, as the jazz cliché has it, God was in the house.

Ronnie and Pete King instinctively knew who the good guys were — even when some aspects of their behaviour might have been unacceptable

elsewhere. Who else would have tolerated an artist who missed the odd set or fell off the bandstand? But for Ronnie, the praise-singers of African-America were consummate heroes who could do little wrong. In return, he expected loyalty and got it — from employees and friends, supporters and punters. When I failed to visit for a long period of time, I mumbled my apologies. "Don't worry," said Pete, "you're family." And so, a family mourns. We mourn a man whose admiration for the poignancy, resilience and creativity of black music translated into untold hours of joy and pleasure for others.

Ronnie Scott, musician and club-owner, born January 28, 1927; died December 23, 1996

Ted Leadbitter

The Labour MP who outed Blunt



Leadbitter... outspoken

THE death at 77 of Ted Leadbitter, Peter Mandelson's predecessor as Labour MP for Hartlepool for 28 years, ended a combative career based on local issues but sprinkled with national celebrity.

Ted revelled in the fact that the tabloids credited him with "flushing out" Sir Anthony Blunt as the Cambridge Soviet spy ring's "fourth man". The late Andrew Boyer, a had long known of Blunt's involvement but libel laws had prevented him from printing it. Leadbitter used parliamentary privilege to ask about

the "fourth man" mentioned in Boyle's *Climate of Treason*. Mrs Thatcher used the opportunity to blast open the Establishment conspiracy — including Blunt's patron the Queen — to keep Sir Anthony's identity secret.

Leadbitter so enjoyed the notoriety that, in his last year as an MP he sought to have the self-confessed "fifth man", John Cairncross, deprived of his pension as an MI6 official.

Leadbitter was born in Durham, an Eastington miner's son, and trained at Cheltenham Teachers' Training College. He was a wartime RAF officer and instructor, then taught at a Hartlepool secondary modern.

A Labour Party member from 1938, in 1954 he was elected to West Hartlepool council. His great disappointment came when the local council later refused to elect him mayor, for fear of losing their one-seat majority. In 1963 he was selected for the Hartlepool seat, then occupied by Tory MP Commander Kerans.

When Kerans decided to stand down, Leadbitter charged him with being afraid of defeat in the looming election.

After Leadbitter won the

seat in 1964, he focused on local issues. He sent a barrage of protests to Tony Benn, postmaster-general in the new Wilson government, to force the removal of a telephone pole planted in a constituency front garden.

Having been a big fish in his local council pool, he never quite adjusted to being a small fish at Westminster. He took to writing incredibly long letters to Harold Wilson, giving advice on almost everything. Sometimes his views were shrilly voiced from the back benches, without his Labour colleagues being able to decide whether he was left, right or centre.

There was puzzlement too in Hartlepool, where he favoured nuclear power at Sellafield, despite being a miner's son.

In parliament, he served on the select committee on science and technology for a decade from 1969 and then acquitted himself in the post serving Teess and Hartlepool. The left-wing duo, Dennis Skinner and the late Bob Cryer egged him on as he savaged incompetent local authorities and the greedy Tory government for pocketing half the proceeds.

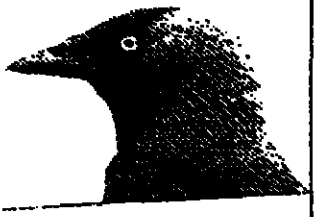
The serious car crash which preceded his death came weeks after the death of Phyllis, his wife of 56 years. They leave behind a son and a daughter.

Andrew Roth
Edward Leadbitter, politician, born June 18, 1919; died December 24, 1996

Birthdays

Irene Adams, Labour MP, 49; Anne Armstrong, former US ambassador to Britain, 69; Christopher Benjamin, actor, 62; John Charles, footballer, 68; Gerard Depardieu, actor, 48; Pat Meehan, former rally driver, 62; Donald Northcote, plant biochemist, 75; Mike Pender, rock singer, 64; Peter Quail, rock musician, 53; Prof Brinley Rees, classical scholar, 77; Dr Edward Saito, Japanese, journalist and broadcaster, 50; the Rt Rev Michael Turnbull, Bishop of Durham, 61; Brig Dame Mary Tyrwhitt, former director, the WRAC, 93.

Jackdaw



It's all over

Q: WHAT is the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement? A: VHEMT (pronounced vehement) is a movement not an organisation. It's a movement about life on planet Earth. We're not just a bunch of misanthropes and anti-social, Malthusian misfits, taking morbid delight whenever disaster strikes humans. Nothing could be further from the truth. Voluntary human extinction is the humane alternative to human disasters. We don't carry on about how the human race has shown itself to be a greedy,

amoral parasite on the once-healthy face of this planet. That type of negativity offers no solution to the inexorable horrors which human activity is causing. Rather, the Movement presents an encouraging alternative to the callous exploitation and wholesale destruction of the Earth's ecology.

As VHEMT volunteers know, the humane alternative to the extinction of millions, probably billions, of species of plants and animals is the voluntary extinction of one species: Homo sapiens... us.

Each time another one of us decides to add another one of us to the burgeoning billions already squatting on this ravaged planet, another ray of hope shines through the gloom. When every human chooses to stop breeding, Earth will be allowed to return to its former glory, and all creatures will be free to live, die, evolve (if they believe in evolution), and perhaps pass away, as so many of Mother Nature's "experiments" have done throughout the eons. Good

health will be restored to the Earth's ecology... to the life form known by many as Gaia.

A New Year's resolution not many of us will be taking up. VHEMT Homepage is at www.vhgmt.org/

Take a toke

WHEN I smoked frequently (in college) I happened to be thinking a lot about spirituality at the same time, and I came up with some hypotheses about the morality of what I was doing to begin with. I was influenced by Lacan's view of the sublime, which is that it is created by the difference between the speaker and the speaker's place in the language structure. In terms of spirituality: I personally believe the concept of God exists as a cultural idea that appeals to subconsciousnesses of groups of people. That is why it is vague: because the subconscious impulses that create God aren't fully understood in the language structure. Now if the subconscious is also the place to which spir-

itualty appeals, then to study your spirituality you must study your subconscious. I believe that smoking marijuana can help you study your subconscious. Here's why: language is what creates meaning, and the subconscious is that which is not expressed through language. When one smokes, one is temporarily distanced from the language structure.

I personally believe that the best way to worship God is, rather than asking for favours or forgiveness, to try to understand God. One can do this by praying in a church, by singing praises, by analysing the concept of God intellectually, or, if my hypothesis is correct, by trying to understand your subconscious connections to God, while smoking. So smoking marijuana could help you understand God not in a traditional questioning way, but also in a personal, contemporary and very living way: by helping you understand exactly what "God" is, in your mind. This isn't to say, of course, that mari-

juana can't be abused or over-used. But if used correctly, it could make the concept of God more real than if you had just one up. Parts of the above argument could also help explain why the strength of the cultural idea that smoking marijuana is wrong: individualism may be treasured among the concepts of America, but a lack of acceptability to society is not. If smoking does move you away from the structured order, then that is a very real threat to that structured order. I would wonder if it would be good for the world as a whole to have a large segment of the population spending their time in isolated introspection without having a productive goal for that introspection. For example, if you sit around smoking up and watching TV all the time, is that really — from a moral, ethical perspective — good? If, however, you use smoking as a tool for helping you understand the world, your thoughts, your approach to things, even God, and make an effort to relate what you've understood to the social structure when you're done, then I believe that smok-

ing marijuana is not only morally benign, it is morally laudable. So go ahead. Smoke a joint for Jesus! Obviously composed while high. Smoke a joint for Jesus is at www.paranoia.com/drugs/stories/marijuana/joint-for-jesus.txt

Dress down

ACTIVELY bad dressing may be an art raised to its highest



Vogue... bad dressing

form in England, but it is not within the reach of all as it requires a keen, if misplaced, interest in fashion. Many of us lack such enthusiasm. The majority of Englishwomen regard the photographs in fashion magazines as having as much pertinence to them as the ones in National Geographic of Guatemalan tree frogs. They will continue to affect the costume of timeless dowdiness, usually involving a blazer and a floral skirt, that may be seen on all occasions when Englishwomen have consciously dressed up.

And yet, this costume is more interesting than it looks, because it has more than a sartorial relevance to the Englishwoman. It has developed as a response to the two test pronouncements invariably posed by Englishwomen when they are about to buy something. The first, somewhere between an oath and a plea, is "it will last forever". This remark, which can be heard issuing from changing rooms the length of the country, and which indicates

a most impressive misunderstanding of the principles of fashion is used to strengthen resolve in the face of any purchase considered expensive.

The other thing Englishwomen always say is: "It's perfectly all right" "This functions as the opposite to "it will last forever", and is used to justify not spending money. Hence when after many years the new-old blazer comes up for review it may be deemed perfectly all right with a bit of a brush. Should the temptation to try something new ever arise, this phrase will be marshalled forth in defence of the old style, often with "it will last forever" presented for reinforcement. Nicola Schulman writing in Vogue tries to pin down why we are famous for our bad dressing the world over.

Jackdaw wants jewels. E-mail jackdaw@guardian.co.uk; fax 0171-713 4366; Jackdaw, The Guardian, 115 Farringdon Road, London EC1R 3ER.

Emily Sheffield

Judges can't be masons

If Sir Frederick won't come clean, he must go

THE POLICE Superintendents' Association expressed reservations over a compulsory register of masonic membership yesterday. It was an important reservation: if it was introduced for the police, it should also be applied to the other arms of the criminal justice system — the criminal prosecution service lawyers, judges, and members of the Police Complaints Authority. Here is an issue which deserves a place on any new government's agenda: the need to end the suspicions which police and other public service staff generate when they join secret organisations. The text could be taken from last month's announcement by the Association of Chief Police Officers calling for more transparency in public service. The chief constables want all officers who are freemasons to register their involvement, are urging all such officers to give up their membership and have also declared their intention to lobby ministers to set up a compulsory register. They were backed yesterday by the Police Complaints Authority, which called for a compulsory register in its evidence to the Commons Select Committee on Home Affairs which is carrying out an inquiry into freemasonry.

A police register looks inevitable. It is now 12 years since the then Metropolitan Commissioner warned police officers of the dangers of joining the masons. He pointed to the oaths which freemasons made — oaths which carried implications that "loyalty to fellow freemasons may supersede any other loyalty". The warning won the immediate support of the chief constables of Greater Manchester and North Wales. His two successors have followed suit and now the chief constables' club has signed up too. Yet the transparency principle which the chief constables want to apply to their officers — it is not confined to freemasons but applies to other secret organisations, such as

the Catholic sect, Opus Dei, too — should apply with equal force to prosecutors and judges. Earlier this month, the Association of Women Barristers expressed concern about the damage which masonic membership on the bench causes to public confidence in the impartiality of the judiciary. They are also worried by masonic influence in judicial appointments, which because of the "secret soundings" carried out by the Lord Chancellor's Department, makes it easier for networks like freemasonry to push friends.

There is an even more immediate issue for the parliamentary committee: the appointment of Sir Frederick Crawford to lead the Criminal Cases Review Authority, the new agency to examine possible miscarriages of justice. If it is desirable for police officers and judges to avoid masonic membership, it is even more important that an agency designed to restore public faith in the criminal justice system should be seen to be above any possible outside interference. Yet, absurdly, as the Guardian revealed in August, the Home Secretary has appointed a mason to lead this crucial new body. Moreover, suspicion remains that the minister was not even aware of the masonic membership when the appointment was made. The Lord Chancellor's Department has acknowledged it does not question judicial candidates about such membership. Home Office ministers have refused to say whether Sir Frederick was asked about — or revealed — his masonic membership but the department has said all applicants for other places on the new agency were asked. Sir Frederick has refused to give any explanations but will appear before the parliamentary committee in the new year. His silence only reinforces the doubts over his suitability. A voluntary resignation was resisted. Can the MPs achieve an involuntary one?



Letters to the Editor

Why the moral right is wrong

THE fact that Anne Atkins rose to fame on a tide of homophobia indicates that she has touched a chord in a society yearning for the good old days of open prejudice, xenophobia and infatuation (Charge of the right and proper brigade, December 23). But the key is that our society has a problem with children. It treats them like aliens: to be feared, misunderstood, controlled and punished.

Earlier this month, I read Mrs Atkins's advice to a parent to smack a child. The confused mother wrote back to say that when she smacked her four-year-old, he smacked her back. Mrs Atkins's response was: "That's why God made you bigger."

I wonder, does Mrs Atkins advise us to smack writers who don't do as they are told, or bank managers who don't give you the loan you ask for? If not, why not? Because it is a criminal offence to smack adults. The fact is that Mrs Atkins's advice amounts to incitement of hatred and violence against the weakest group in society. Smacking children is domestic violence; it is an abuse of power.

Violence towards children only teaches them that violence is a legitimate language to use against people who don't do what you want them to do, or when you just can't control yourself. Small wonder that so many kids are engaged in violence, truancy, bullying and other disruptive activities.

(Dr) Effrat Tseelion,
Senior Lecturer in Social
Leeds Metropolitan
University,
Leeds LS1 5HE.

WHAT makes Anne Atkins problematic for the rest of us is that they make it all seem so easy. Your child is naughty? Smack him. Your marriage has died and love lies somewhere else? Stick with the dead marriage. All your sexually-conscious life you've been attracted to your own gender? Ignore it.

There is a thought for the child's reasons for behaving badly, for the consequences in your relationship with him or her, not a moment's bother with the quality of love between adults in an intimate relationship, no time for real feelings, real respect for your individual self, or real listening to the unique voice of the other person.

The legacy of the sixties need not be "permissiveness", whatever that is. It can be an understanding of ourselves, of other people and of the relationship between the two.

Allison Leonard,
6 Todland Grove,
Chester CH2 2EY.

These views seem to take precedence over everything else — including the balance sheet.

(Dr) Julian Petley,
Dept of Human Sciences,
Brunel University,
Kingston Lane,
Uxbridge UB8 3PH.

THE laws of Moses commanded that women caught in adultery be stoned to death. Jesus, confronting a crowd that wanted to do just that, asked each individual to examine their consciences and only if they found them clear to accuse others of sin.

I therefore assume that, as a good Christian, Anne Atkins has examined her conscience and found herself as pure and good and innocent as her Lord.

She will also have arrived at a perfect understanding of his will, an understanding that surpasses what is merely written in the Bible of her faith. In that book, there is little evidence of the stultification of the homosexuality she has condemned, while Jesus advocates tolerance frequently — not only for the woman taken in adultery.

Kundratka 2, Praha 8,
Liben, Czech Republic.

Cold comfort in bleak houses

GEORGE Monbiot's excellent article (Bleak House, December 24) is rightly critical of the Department of the Environment's five-year delay in publishing the shocking energy figures from the 1994 House Condition Survey. But the misery and cost consequences of unheated houses are even greater than he suggests.

Cold houses result in condensation which, in turn, results in mould growth. Spores from these moulds are a proven cause of asthma, especially in children, and other illnesses. Apart from the excess winter deaths, the direct cost to the health service of cold and damp-induced illness exceeds £1 billion a year, in addition to the costs of educational and production loss resulting from the deterioration of the housing stock, the ruination of decorations, furnishings and personal possessions, and the costs to social services and housing administration are added, the total would go a long way over, say, 10 years to meet the necessary investment to raise the UK's housing stock to a standard comparable to that of our North European neighbours.

Thomas A Markus,
Emeritus Professor of
Building Science,
University of Strathclyde,
Livingston Gardens,
Glasgow G12 9XD.

IN the New Year, a cross-party group of MPs will introduce to Parliament the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation (15-Year Programme) Bill. The bill will mandate successive governments to insulate effectively 500,000 homes a year for 15 years.

The payback will be huge. Conservatively, up to 50,000 new jobs will be created through manufacturing, installing, servicing and repairing a range of energy-conservation goods and materials. The Treasury and taxpayers will gain some £9,000 per year for every person escaping the cold queue. Polluting emissions will tumble and domestic fuel bills will fall. Tens of thousands of lives will be saved every winter.

This is no millennium fantasy. But Treasury short-termism will only be overcome if citizens — ie voters and taxpayers — demand that the Bill becomes law.

Charles Secrett,
Bernard Jones,
Friends of the Earth,
26-28 Underwood Street,
London W1M 7JQ.

Scenting a speedy victory

Labour must not be deflected from its anti-hunting stance

THE UNSPOKEN word among the unspokeable as they gathered to pursue the unseatable in their traditional Boxing Day foxhunts yesterday was that, because of the likelihood of a Labour government, this might be the last time they experienced the pleasures of the chase in this way. As it turned out, gathering was all they were able to do on this occasion; this was because freezing temperatures made the ground too solid for horseriding and all but one of the hunts monitored by the League Against Cruel Sports were cancelled. League spokesman Kevin Saunders claimed that only the Royal Artillery Hunt was able to ride out on Salisbury Plain, although it also gave up early at 2pm after catching one fox. Hunters fear the election of a Labour government for the simple reason that Labour activists have never been more opposed to hunting than they are today. A large Labour majority at the general election would virtually guarantee the passage of an anti-hunting Private Member's Bill in the new Parliament.

Earlier this week, the hunters saw a glimmer of hope when an unsourceed article in the Daily Telegraph suggested that Labour wanted to postpone the issue by appointing a two-year inquiry into field sports before submitting any legislation to parliament. Given what has happened to so many other Labour pledges this year, it all sounded very plausible. But not this time. The story was based more on hope than on fact — even though Tony Blair's closest ad-

viser is a hunter — and was rapidly rebutted out of existence by the Labour leader's office on Christmas Eve.

The Telegraph story was quite possibly planted by Labour's pro-hunting minority in the hope that a few well-publicised examples of Boxing Day misbehaviour yesterday by saboteurs might help to bounce the party into a nervous denial of its existing pledge. It wasn't an entirely impossible scenario until bad weather stopped play yesterday. But Labour should beware of running for cover on hunting in spite of a good deal of white propaganda (like the Bicester hunt follower interviewed on BBC radio yesterday, who claimed that some people hunted the same fox year and year again so easy was it for a cunning fox to shake off its galloping pursuers).

The hunting lobby still hopes that even if Labour sticks to its plans — notwithstanding an intensified lobbying campaign to persuade it to do otherwise — the parliamentary timetable would make it highly unlikely that the Bill would become law before next year's Christmas hunt. Maybe. This is one of the very few public issues on which young voters, apathetic about so much else, are aroused to genuine commitment. A party which abandoned a pledge of this kind would win very few extra votes in rural England while losing millions of disillusioned urban votes among the very generations on whom it will most rely for electoral success.

Christmas spirit

ALEX Brummer is right that a fair tax system will test Tony Blair's Christian Socialist credentials (Economics Notebook, December 24).

A resolution passed unanimously at the recent Church of England's Faith in the City conference stated: "We should work for policies which provide resources through higher rates of taxation for those earning more, and far more rigorous corporate taxation".

My plea to politicians before the general election is that we have a responsible debate about taxation. Christmas is not a bad time to start it as it was a Roman taxation exercise that was responsible for Jesus's birth at Bethlehem.

(RT Rev) Roger Sainsbury,
Bishop of Barking,
110 Capel Road, London E7 0JS.

A tale of two venues in the worst of times

WHAT you omit to mention in your report about Sir John Hall's plans for the biggest stadium in Europe for Newcastle United Football Club (Newcastle, December 20), is the loss of city-centre green areas, including two parks, allotments and open moorland if his plans go ahead. In the heart of Newcastle, a stadium will take on play areas and hundreds of trees would disappear.

You quote Sir John as saying "We're very conscious of the kids can't get in" but most "kids" won't get in however big the stadium, since a season ticket costs £200. Going to "the match" is likely to remain a dream for most

people living on Tyneside. There are areas of derelict wasteland in the city which could be used for his new stadium but Sir John wants this area to be bulldozed.

YOUR details of the national pop music centre in Sheffield are too bad to be true (Sheffield scores a pop music triumph, December 20). Not only is London the logical place since the large local population can nip round all the time, but round en-

claves are, with square ones, the worst shapes for concert halls — prime example, the Albert Hall.

I am beginning to be seriously concerned by the British failure to produce a top international concert-hall designer or hire foreign ones. There is a lot wrong with the Albert Hall and the Barbican, while the Festival Hall is beginning to look mediocre.

Moreover, architects are too busy being "original" to use the best method of concert-hall design, which is to copy an existing, successful hall. This is the secret of the Wigmors Hall, for instance.

Bernard Jones,
8 New Cavendish Street,
London W1M 7LJ.

Lower speeds will save lives

Why doesn't the Government have more 20mph limits now?

BRITAIN has a good record in recent years of reducing the number of serious accidents on our roads, including accidents to children. But good doesn't mean good enough. A total of 133 child pedestrians were killed on the roads in 1995, one of the worst child fatality rates in Europe. Such improvement as there has been has been achieved by action on a broad front, including drinking and driving curbs, internal improvements to cars (like safety belts and air bags) and the enforcement of speed limits. Now it is time for a fresh initiative to cut the unacceptably high number of accidents to children where there is a straight trade-off between death, speed and preventive safety measures. Ironically, the recent fall in child deaths on the roads isn't a sign that roads are getting safer but that they are getting more dangerous — because far fewer children, particularly of primary school age, travel to school by them-

selves. During the last 20 years, the proportion of seven to eight-year-olds allowed to travel to school without adult supervision has fallen from 80 per cent to less than 10 per cent. According to the Transport Research Laboratory, road accidents involving schoolchildren have been cut by 67 per cent at 200 of the 20-mile-an-hour traffic calming sites that the TRL has been monitoring.

The 20mph areas reduced average speeds by 9.3mph and encouraged more parents to allow their children to cycle to work (thereby freeing them from having to make unnecessary car journeys). If 20mph speed limits were monitored by automatic speed cameras — which have a salutary effect on those caught by them — then there would be considerable scope to reduce accidents to children further and encourage the return of the bicycle as a healthy, cost-effective means of transport.

New front opens in pensions war

LORD Mackay of Ardrrecks is dissembling (Letters, December 23). He will be aware of the recent Early Day Motion, which had the support of 280 MPs across the parties, supporting the creation of a sub-department of Ex-service Affairs within an existing ministry. This, hardly looks as if they are satisfied that veterans are being given the treatment to which they should be entitled.

The Government washed its hands of this matter by saying that somehow this would deprive the rest of society. It seems to many ex-service people that the Government is totally ignoring the unique demands made on members of the armed forces; which, in some cases, have resulted in unforeseen and unfortunate consequences.

Gulf War Syndrome is a case in point in which the Government has had to make a complete U-turn. Deafness caused by military service is another area in which the Government is seen to have been less than frank. The lack of compensa-

tion for ex-Japanese prisoners is yet another example.

With regard to the plight of widows of ex-servicemen who married after their husband's retirement, this highlights one obvious difference between the armed forces and the majority of civilians in so far that servicemen retire much earlier than the majority of civilians and are therefore far more likely to marry or re-marry after retirement.

Members of Parliament enjoy a pension fund which provides for their widows irrespective of their date of marriage. They legislate on their own pay and conditions, yet it appears that they are not prepared to treat the widows of ex-service post-retirement marriages with equity.

James Nicholl,
Amber Farmhouse,
Amber Lane, Trull,
Taunton, Somerset TA3 7AA.

A Country Diary

NORTHUMBERLAND: It is good news that no more sand is to be extracted from Druridge Bay and the threat of a nuclear power station has been lifted. After two days of strong winds, I went down to Cresswell with my jute sack for pickings of shells, wood for the fire and odd pieces of sea coal. Where the tiny creek of Henscott voids into the North Sea, small areas of fossilised forest had been exposed. This area was once a stretch of woodland and, as the tide draws out, skeletal roots of ancient trees in a half-way stage between peat and carboniferous substance are exposed. Sixty whooper swans arrived at Druridge from Russia last month and I see them fly over the dunes to Cresswell pond. Mostly, they stay in compact flocks feeding on local rape fields. "They'll go back to Russia in March," the warden at Low Hauxley told me. He walks this Northumberland Wildlife Trust reserve and told me that a short-eared owl had arrived

from Scandinavia; he sees it regularly on the dunes and in the plantation. He also reports several migrating woodcock and a bar-tailed godwit on the foreshore as well as the over-wintering birds from the tundra, redshank and knots. "We have a resident fox on the dunes but he leaves the birds alone and hunts the rabbits," the warden said. "He doesn't like getting his feet wet." During my walk, I see two heron fishing for sculpin on seaweed-covered rocks and in the pools which the outgoing tide has left. In my Dictionary of British Natural History, they are described as marshland birds, but they no longer have frogs and freshwater fish in marshes to resort to and seem to have abandoned communal nidification in this county. Instead, they haunt marine and riverine habitat. My dogs disturb scoters. Duck haunting the shoreline. Described as a "raft" of duck, they spring into the air in flustered parties.

VERONICA HEATH

طاب الله من الامم

Diary

Matthew Norman

As we devote ourselves to seasonal pleasure, spare a thought, please, for the selfless men and women waiting around the corner with the breathalyzers. The Sun sponsors the Police Bravery Awards, but can anyone explain why appreciators of fine officers should be the preserve of the populist right? And so, on behalf of the liberal left, we present the inaugural Guardian Diary Awards for Police Intelligence. Thanks to Dogberry, my so-called rival on Police Magazine, for helping the Diary with its enquiries.

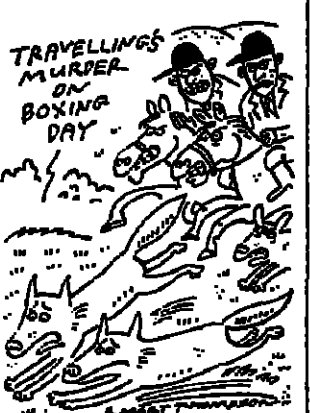
THE Platinum Tear Gas Canister for Sensitive Ethnic Policing stays in London yet again, going this year to Harrow. After a report of armed men in uniforms entering the local Kurdish community centre in June, some 50 officers responded. Cars rushed to the scene, marked with a position on rooftops, and a helicopter was dispatched. Anyone emerging from the hall was handcuffed, and forbidden to communicate with each other in Kurdish or Turkish until, after an hour, police smashed down the doors and entered. What they found were the props and scripts used by the Kurdish actors from the Yek Yek (New Life) company in a production of Harold Pinter's play, Mountain Language. "We had told the local police about it and they said there would be no problem," said the centre's chairman. "We even had receipts for the plastic guns, but the police wouldn't listen to anyone who was Kurdish or let them talk to each other." The play is about the persecution of people who choose to speak their own dialect.

ROTTEN Apple — and remember, it only takes one to poison the whole barrel — goes to the uniformed officers of Wath, South Yorkshire, where two CID colleagues briefly left their jam to tin of coffee unattended early this year. When they later opened it and found an alarming, slimy, green substance, frantic enquiries ensued and manufacturers were warned of the danger of sabotage. The crisis passed, however, when it emerged that certain uniforms at the station, having nicked their colleagues' coffee, had sought to cover their tracks by pouring into the tin an entire can of mushy peas.

THE race for the Golden Deerstalker for Uncanny Powers of Observation was fierce. Runner-up is PC Garrett of Worcester, who submitted a report that read as follows: "Three racing pigeons (tagged, grey) can be identified by cooing-type noise." The winner, however, is PC Reif, who while on attachment to Telford CID filled in a form about a suspect's appearance. His answers in the section on facial hair are: "None. He has a moustache. Colour: black. Description: top of lips."

MANY a beat officer fantasises of becoming a top detective, but few have the skills to make that dream come true. One who does is PC Dean Cunningham of Albany Street nick, which is in central London. He wins the Scarlet Pimpernel award for being a master of disguise. When officers were unable to execute a search warrant on a building to which the only entry point was a huge steel door, which was closed, PC Cunningham had a brainwave. He went to the trouble of borrowing a postman's uniform, put it on, strode up to the door and knocked hard. "Who is it?" called a voice from within. "It's the postman, Constable Cunningham."

KEYSTONE commendation goes to Jim McAuley of Strathclyde. Approached by a local worried that a dog was trapped inside an electronic advertising board in a bus station, he investigated and indeed heard the yelping of a puppy. Just as PC McAuley was about to kick out a shopkeeper raced over to stop him. "What about the wee dog?" said PC McAuley. "That's a wee dog." That's a sound effect for a video of 101 Dalmatians.



After peace on earth, no surrender as usual

Commentary

Peter Preston

WELL, that's two days of Peace on Earth over. It may now be appropriate to observe that the Lord, as represented by His various earthly followers, is not too hot on the actual mechanics of peace: and to mention the necessary giving as well as the taking.

Two vignettes from the last two months. Dick Spring, Europe's nearest temporary thing to a Foreign Minister, arrives in the Middle East and solemnly tours the relevant capitals — lecturing Israel on the sacrifices required. Malcolm Rifkind arrives in Nicolas and spends a similar span of days instructing Greek and Turkish Cypriots on the art of living together.

Nobody, at either destination, laughs out loud. Why on (no peace on) earth not? Mr Spring and Mr Rifkind are exalted representatives of two governments who have failed, over a quarter of a century, to bring peace to an island their two nations share. They are not, yet again, getting any

where. The killing streets are about to re-open for bloody business.

Let's talk necessities. The last best hope for Irish peace, so long, long ago — Brian Faulkner's power-sharing executive — was wrecked by British politics. Ted Heath had his problem with Joe Gormley, and the miners. It was predictable that Ulster would be destroyed in the aftermath. Mr Faulkner was duly minced. We in London may say that human lives come first. Our politicians may covet their Nobel prizes. But when it comes to a crunch, domestic imperatives automatically rule. Does anyone, looking back over the last 18 months of quest-peace, suppose that John Major's Westminster survival — and thus the acquiescence of the Unionists — has not been top of the shop? Does anyone (still more malignantly) suppose that four extra months of co-existing inertia will be Belfast towards reality? Obviously not. They will probably be the final dismemberment of this increasingly nerveless initiative.

Yet no one thinks or writes of putting peace first. No one suggests a general election in January or February in order to unlock the process. That would be to put lives lost — bombs and murders and mayhem — ahead of the Downing Street game that Mr Major habitually plays; and Mr Blair, to be fair, would surely

play on exactly the same terms. Peace isn't a priority. The spin doctors park it at the back of their shelves. We mouth the familiar adjectives of outrage so glibly. We care, but not enough.

It is exactly the same on the Ulster ground. Were the Army Council ever sold on permanent peace — or did they, in their narrow, isolated world, always think cease-fires another transitory means to a deluded end? Gerry Adams chose politics. What ageing revolutionary, after a lifetime of getting nowhere, wouldn't have tried to make politics work for him? But he seems to lack the resolve or the realism to go the whole way.

And so, alas, do most Ulster politicians — the leaders that the people of Northern Ireland, for all their marches and their vigils, still insist on electing. David Trimble does not believe in peace, he believes in peace on his terms, which are incapable of bringing peace. He will hang out for a few extra fish or flirt with Jimmy Goldsmith, because the Irish Republic is broken on Europe. But he will not talk necessary sacrifices.

And Ian Paisley is Trimble squared, the embodiment of the impossibility of compromise. Yet when the ordinary folk of Ulster, lighting candles for peace and chattering to TV interviewers about the wonders of a life without fear, encounter a ballot box, they do

not change their ancient allegiances — but merely confirm them. This year, perhaps, a few more may switch from Trimble to Paisley. What price peace, if it can never be voted for? Peace does not just happen. It requires concessions at the top and the living of it down below.

Did Mr Spring think that, as he passed through Jerusalem? As he watched Benjamin Netanyahu, a relatively modern-seeming man, did he catch a glimpse of David Trimble? Did the newly elected leader of Israel — the provider of "peace and security" — as though they were peas in a pod — seem to him a politician who knew about concessions or a politician who can concede very little, because he will not give what defines him, or lacks the courage to confront his zealots, to insist on necessity? And what did Mr Rifkind

think amid the burgeoning skyscraper hotels and the bustling economy of Greek Cyprus? Here is prospectively the simplest peace of them all. The island has been effectively divided for almost 30 years. The Greeks, in division, have prospered as well as festered. The Turks, beholden to their frail mainland protectors, have rotted in isolation. The two communities lived together cheek by jowl in the same villages for centuries. They used to be friends. The purpose of another quarter century of living in armed camps whilst Europe changes

around them is elusive. The UN has brokered a prospective settlement over decades. But who will be brave enough to seize it? Who will explain the necessary compromises? Who, yet again, will insist? Democracies may find it very difficult to go to war; but when they do, they find the peace even more difficult to make.

It requires great resolution — as from the thousands of Serbs who march through Belgrade day by day — or the imperative of great pressure. That's why, perversely, the Hebron agreement is more than a solitary, ghastly concession: it is a link in the chain that binds the people of the Middle East together. That's why the hulk of Yugoslavia may one day find a newly steady state. But Cyprus? The only pressure there is the force of realism, it has been a long time coming.

And Northern Ireland? Prepare to despair. The British Government exerts no steady pressure, more bi-partisan anxiety. It pays the bills, loads on the subsidies. It makes the sacrifices itself, sends soldiers to die. It often needs the votes. It barely insists. It never, ever insists.

I heard Robert Eames, the Anglican Primate of All Ireland, doing his own Peace on Earth tour this Christmas. Bosnia, the West Bank — why not Ireland? Ah, he said, we are different — such a small, close-knit community; our problems are more complex than Sarajevo. No easy fixes here. Which is another bleak way of saying that the Province, in death, is central, but peripheral. That the people of Northern Ireland may generally be keen on peace; but, in particular, they know nothing of its necessary price. And that we in England, Scotland and Wales, who wring our hands, have never come to terms with the brute needs on peace on this tiny patch of our own earth.

Home for the holidays with New Labour



Bel Littlejohn

HAPPY Christmas? Hardly. Last week's column, you'll remember, gave the reader a stunning insight into the psychology of present-giving, warning women away from those men who give them luxury or household items, trips abroad, theatre, cinema or restaurant visits, designer clothes, sexy lingerie, or clothes their mothers might wear. All these, I pointed out, were a sure sign of a control freak. So what happened? My bloke gave me scarlet suspenders and matching stockings.

I won't delineate the parameters of our subsequent discussion — I'm a very private person away from award-winning columns — but after repeated cross-questioning it emerged that he hadn't bothered to read last week's column — not even once.

Something on the sports pages, he said, had "caught his eye". What? "Wrestling". Wrestling? I couldn't believe it. The times I've argued — forcefully, cogently, without losing my cool — that wrestling is a barbaric sport full of male testosterone, a sport (so-called) that would be banned in any halfway-civilised country — and yet here he is, saying he's neglected my seminal psychological insights for a piece on wrestling.

But you're not even interested in wrestling, I pointed out. "I'm not," he said. "I got it wrong. I thought it was women's all-in mud-wrestling."

We split up at 10.12am precisely on Christmas Day. I don't expect to see him again. "Nuff said. Good riddance. (But if he's reading this, I've faintly wouldn't comply with household hygiene regulations under a New Labour government."

Barbara wondered if Mary really looked best in blue, while Harriet couldn't help fussing about Mary and Jo's decision not to upgrade their accommodation. "I mean, if you know three financially secure kings, it's quite simply unfair on the less-well-off not to opt yourself of the opportunity to avoid out of the already over-inflated public sector. For heaven's sake, let's not play politics with our kiddies' lives," she argued, forcefully.

The subsequent discussion took my mind off my ex-bloke, involving me in the real process of decision-making. 1997 is the year to put our old Tory problems behind us, and to find some new ones to enjoy under New Labour. Cheers!



Tony Banks hands out his own awards to the year's parliamentary superheroes

Beyond our Ken

AT THE best of times, the House of Commons is an odd-ball place full of even odder people, but at present it has become surreal. We are all living on borrowed time.

Among the Tories brave faces abound but many know, or suspect, that they are already numbered with the politically undead and simply waiting for termination day to be announced. But politicians, just like football supporters, travel optimistically and are always hoping something momentous is just about to happen.

and assume substance. Some strut with an air of ludicrous self-importance, whilst those wiser are calculating coming difficulties.

After all, Margaret Thatcher was burnt toast in 1981 — and then General Galtieri helpfully invaded the Falklands. Who knows, perhaps at this very moment Saddam Hussein is planning a pre-emptive strike against the Isle of Dogs. Or Prince Edward will marry the most pro-Tory Spice Girl.

background of cynicism that Ken Clarke wins my nomination as Parliamentarian of the Year. There is something very appealing about a politician who apparently doesn't give a damn about what his colleagues think of him and actually seems to enjoy flaunting the fact. Watching him at the Despatch Box, defending the Government's position on the single currency reminded me of Landseer's painting of The Stag at Bay. He may be a rather portly

straggled language of our dear Home Secretary outlining his latest 30-something-point plan to deal with crime — and that after 17 years of government by the self-anointed party of law and order? Only someone like Michael Howard, who has had his sense of irony surgically removed, would fall to blush even as he utters the things he does.

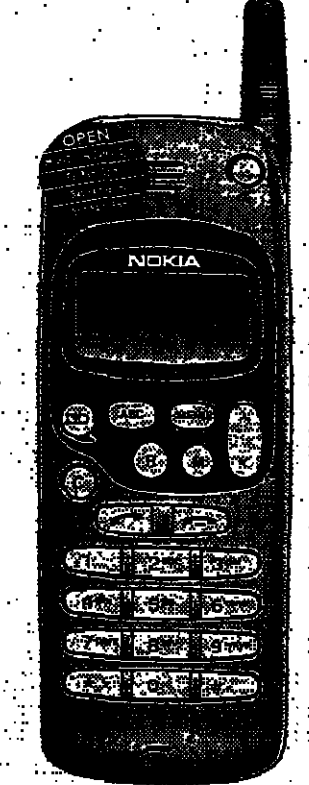
For inventiveness and imagination, my nomination for Backbencher of the Year credit to a St Bernard. So, by a short and very brown nose, Michael Fabricant gets my overall nomination as Backbencher of the Year.

My final category is that of the Steve Norris Survivor of the Year award. Initially, I was tempted to give it to Neil Hamilton — who could so easily have been tempted to accept it — but once again, even at this late stage of the game, it goes to John Major. Throughout the year, he stood like the boy on the burning deck of the Titanic, with his finger in the dyke, an apple on his head, and his foot in his mouth.

It was a triumph of survival against all the political odds and one the Labour Party would do well to note. After all, we got caught out trying to fix the Radio 4 Personality of the Year award for someone with a personality but the Tories did it for someone without one. Peter Mandelson has a lot to learn in the next four months...

Other than the public hanging of Tony Benn and Dennis Skinner, what more could Labour do to reassure Middle England of our fitness to govern? But despite all this, the nagging doubt remains. Can we really trust the electorate? Of course they are concerned about unemployment, homelessness, poverty etc. And, yes, they do want to spend more on hospitals, schools and transport — until it's their turn to do something.

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Suzanne Goldenberg meets formerly high-flying female workers from Kabul, forced out of their jobs by edicts of the ruling Taliban

Women wait to lift veil of silence

SHAFIQA Habibi was once the face of Afghanistan. The longest-serving announcer on state radio and television, she has become the invisible woman confined to her home by a Taliban edict that forbids women to work, and by the fear of venturing into the uncertain streets of a ruined city.

In the three months since the Taliban captured Kabul, Ms Habibi has left her flat four times to collect her salary and to attend funerals. On each occasion, she put on *chadereh*, a head-to-toe shroud with a filigree pattern over the eyes. "I used to wear one of these if I didn't want to be recognised," she laughs. "Every time I went out children would run after me, call-

ing my name. I enjoyed the fame at first, but then it became a burden." Her daughter, a school-teacher also forced to stay at home, reverently hands around photographs from the

Afghanistan — renamed Radio Shari'a — for slip-ups by her former trainees. "I get upset, it's so bad," she says. However, Ms Habibi does not despair. Having survived several regimes since she

digna Siddique, an architect who was removed as the director of the Polytechnic Institute, argues that the harsh regime of the Taliban cannot endure. "A movement, no matter how strong, is just a movement. It does not last forever," she says. "God willing, we won't be at home like this forever. It's the beginning of the Taliban era. No one knows what will happen."

Like most high-profile women in Kabul, Ms Habibi and Ms Siddique have gone to ground since September. Many of their former colleagues are convinced they have fled the country or been arrested. There were even rumours that Ms Siddique and her sister Sobahia — until recently chief surgeon at the 400-bed Afghan army hospital and a two-star general — had

been killed. The sisters, the proud daughters of Afghan royalty, do not answer the door to strangers. Although Sobahia has not been permitted to work, medical personnel generally are exceptions to the ban on working women. An estimated 150,000 women held jobs in Kabul before the Taliban came in, many earning the sole income for households which had lost all their men to the war. In recent weeks the Taliban have softened somewhat, allowing women to take part in income-generating schemes run by aid organisations.

Ms Habibi likens the repression of women to the backlash that followed the outlawing of the veil in Kabul by the modernising King Amanullah in 1928. The king,

who scandalised tribal chiefs by escorting his wife to parties, was overthrown a year later, and it was more than 30 years before women re-entered public life. All three women are cer-

Ms Habibi was lined up with the other broadcasters for an entire, terrifying night. The Siddique sisters argue that the Taliban strictures owe little to the true spirit of Islam. Together, they have de-

ferred has nothing to do with Islam or Afghan culture. Our only custom is to wear a large shawl," says Sadiqa. "If someone hits me even once I will hit them back four times. I even picked up a stone once to throw at one of the Taliban."

She maintains that Islam, properly interpreted, provides women with all rights. "If the Taliban carry on like this in the future we can fight for women's rights through Islam." That struggle must wait. "Now is not the time because there is still war in Afghanistan and our enemies will be very quick to take advantage of that," Sobahia says. But she is hopeful. "No one knows what will happen. After every night there is a dawn and the future may hold new things."

'If someone hits me even once I will hit them back four times'

glory days of Ms Habibi's career: a glamour shot, with her long hair swirling down to her shoulders on the cover of the Voice of Pathans in 1976, and a picture of her, aged 16, in front of a large old-fashioned microphone. "Television, seen as evil by the Taliban, has been taken off the air. Ms Habibi spends her days monitoring Radio

began her career in 1961, she has been quietly meeting Taliban officials, trying to win a return to the workplace on behalf of the radio's 300 female staff, certain the new regime will temper its views on working women. "Slowly, slowly, we have to be patient and hope they will change." Her views are shared by other prominent women. Sa-

'If the Taliban carry on we can fight for women's rights through Islam'

tain they will survive this latest upheaval. Ms Habibi is proud to have stayed on the air since 1981. Seventeen years ago today, she had just finished reading the 7pm bulletin when she heard gunfire outside the studio, and watched a guard slump to his feet. Soldiers burst into the room; the Russian invasion of Afghanistan had begun, and

fired the religious police who deliver instant punishment to women who show their faces in public. Unlike all but the very elderly and very poor in Kabul, who move out in *chadereh*, the sisters venture out with shawls covering their heads, but not their faces. "When women go to Mecca they show their faces. Chu-

Envoy freed in Peruvian siege

Jane Diaz-Linares in Lima

LEFTWING guerrillas holding more than 100 hostages at the Japanese ambassador's residence in the Peruvian capital yesterday freed Guatemala's ambassador, José María Argueta. The release apparently because of his ill health, leaves 103 people still captive. They are held by the Tupac Amaru guerrillas, who are demanding the release of several hundred colleagues from Peruvian jails. Two Peruvian ministers and four ambassadors are among those still held.

The Peruvian authorities yesterday strengthened the ring of heavily armed police around the Japanese residence, after security forces were rattled by an early-morning blast in the compound.

There were no reports of injuries. The International Red Cross, citing unconfirmed sources, said the explosion was caused by "an animal". The guerrillas say that they have mined the gardens to deter attack, and one theory was that a cat or dog triggered a landmine.

Some 19 guerrillas inside the building have an arsenal of arms, bullets and explosives. They have grenades at their waists and some freed hostages have even said they have explosive devices attached to a rip cord rigged up on their backs.

Today marks the eleventh day of the crisis, and concern about the health of the hostages remains intense, even though a team of Red Cross doctors has been visiting regularly.

On Christmas Day, the first-secretary at the Japa-

nese embassy in Lima, Kenji Hirata, was brought out in a wheelchair by a Red Cross worker and released. He looked pale and weak.

The role of the bishop of the Andean city of Ayacucho, Juan Luis Cipriani, who walked out of the residence with the freed hostage, has raised speculation that he was acting as an envoy for President Alberto Fujimori.

The bishop, considered the clergyman closest to Mr Fujimori, spent more than six hours inside the residence on Christmas Day, ostensibly to say mass and hear confessions.

He returned to talk to the Red Cross team near the residence yesterday, underlining the possibility that he might be acting as a mediator.

Mr Fujimori has made only one public statement since the crisis began on December 17 and has been holed up with

his closest advisers in the government palace.

There are fears that the countries which have hostages still inside might break rank after the release on Saturday of the Uruguayan ambassador, Tobías Bocalanegro.

The Tupac Amaru rebels freed Mr Bocalanegro shortly after Montevideo authorities released two Peruvians suspected of belonging to the rebel group. Peru was seeking to extradite the two.

Peru has made no official comment but Lima has recalled the acting head of its embassy in Uruguay.

Japanese authorities also criticised Uruguay because its decision apparently contravenes Mr Fujimori's hard-line refusal to release any Tupac Amaru prisoners from Peruvian prisons.

Bolivia has said it will not follow suit.



A man keeps vigil outside the embassy compound in Lima, where 103 hostages are held. PHOTOGRAPH BY SCOTT DALTON

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News in brief

Hopes grow for signatures on Hebron deal within days

ISRAELIS and Palestinians say they are on the verge of a Hebron deal, with the signing expected before the new year and the withdrawal of Israeli troops by January 5. The upbeat assessments came as negotiators met yesterday to put the agreement in writing. "We had some good substantive meetings," said Martin Indyk, the United States ambassador to Israel. He said negotiations would continue at the weekend. The Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, expected an agreement to be signed by New Year's Eve. He told a closed-door session of the Palestinian legislative council that an Israeli troop pullback from 80 per cent of Hebron would start a day after the signing and be completed by January 5. An Israeli official confirmed the tentative timetable, saying the agreement could be signed by the heads of the two negotiating teams on Sunday and then presented to the Israeli and Palestinian cabinets for approval. He said Mr Arafat and the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, would sign the accord later next week and redeployment could be completed by January 5. Mr Arafat also told the legislative council Mr Netanyahu had promised that a gradual withdrawal of Israeli troops from West Bank rural areas would start within six weeks of the signing. Mr Arafat had insisted on a specific timetable for the withdrawal as part of the Hebron deal. — AP.

Convict eats cellmate

A SIBERIAN prisoner has been sentenced to death for a second time after he killed and tried to eat his cellmate while on death row, Interfax news agency reported yesterday. During an argument in Barnaul's city prison in May, Andrei Maslich, aged 24, strangled the other man, cut out his liver and tried to boil it in a metal mug over a makeshift fire. Maslich, who was convicted of his fourth murder, was given his first death penalty last year after he and another inmate strangled, cooked and ate a fellow prisoner. On that occasion, he told the authorities he was bored and wanted to visit Moscow, where he thought he would be sent for psychiatric examinations. He told the Altai regional court that he committed the latest act of cannibalism in the hope that experts would declare him insane and he would not be executed for the first. — AP.

Former nanny sues Netanyahu

BINYAMIN Netanyahu's disgruntled former nanny, sacked in July after burning the soup, is suing the Israeli prime minister and his wife Sara for more than \$22,000 in back pay, her lawyer said yesterday. The South African-born Tanya Shaw, aged 21, said in a petition to a Jerusalem labour court that Mr and Mrs Netanyahu had failed to pay extra wages for overtime and for work on the sabbath during her six months of employment, as required by law. These wages, with interest, amounted to 120,000 shekels (\$22,000), her lawyer, Moshe Zingel, said. The judge at the opening hearing ordered the Netanyahu family to respond to the petition within 45 days. Mr Zingel said Ms Shaw's name had been tarnished by the episode and as a result she had been unable to find another job. Ms Shaw revealed after her dismissal that Mrs Netanyahu was obsessed with cleanliness, had called her "a murderer" and thrown her out for burning soup. The scandal was front-page news in the Israeli tabloids for days, embarrassing Mr Netanyahu a month after his election. — Reuter.

Killer storm hits Malaysia

THE death toll of a tropical storm which hit eastern Malaysia on Christmas Day rose to 106 yesterday as rescuers began identifying bodies pulled from rivers and from under debris. Police said about 3,000 people were homeless after tropical storm Greg blew ashore in the state of Sabah from the South China Sea. Sabah's police commissioner, Maizan Shaari, said that only four of the bodies recovered had so far been identified. The death toll was expected to rise because about 100 people were still missing, he said. The maritime rescue and co-ordination centre in Malaysia said the storm drove several ships into shallow waters in the South China Sea. The worst-hit area was Keningau, 95 miles south of Sabah's capital Kota Kinabalu, where 102 bodies were found in rivers or under debris. — Reuter.

فيلسوف من الامل

Crackdown on alcohol industry to raise revenue

Yeltsin tightens his grip on the bottle

Natasha Alova in Moscow

PRESIDENT Boris Yeltsin announced a big crackdown on Russia's huge alcohol industry yesterday to try to stem tax evasion and increase budget revenues.

Mr Yeltsin, who returned to the Kremlin this week after a long absence for heart bypass surgery, announced his decision after presiding over a meeting of the emergency tax commission, which seeks ways to improve tax collection.

The state loses 2 trillion roubles (\$220 million) per month because of the out-rages in the alcohol market, Mr Yeltsin's chief of staff, Anatoly Chubais, said.

He said the moves were intended to "reinstatate the state monopoly" of the alcohol market. However, the government would not be nationalising any of the hundreds of privately owned distilleries or traders.

The government has empowered enforcement agencies to "radically toughen controls on the entire chain of production, from imports and distilleries ... to the retail trade," Mr Chubais said.

Russia desperately needs to increase its tax revenues to

begin paying millions of state workers who have gone months without salaries.

The lucrative alcohol market, which is full of tax loopholes, is an obvious target, but it is unclear whether the authorities can effectively implement the plan.

According to figures released last month, the gov-

ernment's alcohol control authority, was sacked yesterday for failing to introduce proper controls.

Under the new, stricter controls, licensing will be centralised and regional governments will no longer be able to grant permission to make and sell alcohol.

Illegal alcohol imports often come to Russia via Ukraine and Belarus, officials said.

Russia and Belarus have an open border and large quantities of alcohol enter Russia without any taxes being paid. Mr Chubais said Russia would send more customs officials to Ukraine to guard against illegal alcohol imports.

In the Soviet era, about a third of Russia's budget came from taxes on alcohol. The government lost control of the market in the recent economic havoc, causing the figure to drop sharply.

Government revenues for 1996 have been only 70 per cent of projections, leaving it desperately short of cash. Pension arrears are projected to reach 16 trillion roubles by the end of the year.

Mr Yeltsin described the situation as catastrophic and immoral and ordered the government to cover all pension arrears by next July, Mr Chubais said. — AP.

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'The overall quality will rise. Fewer people will get poisoned with bad vodka'

ernment collected only 4 trillion roubles in excise taxes on alcoholic drinks in the first eight months of 1996 — less than half the target figure.

Vodka producers hailed the long-awaited move, which they hoped would benefit legitimate producers as well as the state.

"The state will get additional revenues, the overall quality will rise. Fewer people will get poisoned with bad vodka," said Vladimir Yarmoch of Spiritown producers' association.

Alla Vdovenko, head of the



Elderly Russian women sell vodka on a Moscow street. Smugglers, moonshiners and bootleggers are estimated to cost the state \$220 million a month. PHOTOGRAPH: DIMA KOROTAYEV

King's blunt message hits Belgium hard

Stephen Bates in Brussels

FOR once, it was a royal Christmas message with a bite. Belgiums tuning in to watch King Albert II's Christmas Eve broadcast heard an extraordinarily blunt assessment of a true *Annus Horribilis* — probably the country's most tragic and disastrous since the second world war.

The Eton-educated King Albert, a rump, paunchy, pin-striped figure in his early sixties, called for national regeneration after a year of disasters which have shaken Belgians out of their complacency and called them to question the authority and competence of their institutions.

In barely coded language, the king questioned the integrity of ministers and officials: "We wish that all people in public positions of authority would identify with the population and consider themselves to be in its service. We want a society where a new type of responsible citizenship develops and everyone is involved. Everyone must play their part."

A series of events in 1996 has conspired to undermine national self-confidence. Even the banks nearly ran out of money after a series of robberies.

As Belgium faces up to its economic weakness in the run-up to European monetary union, the government has resorted to desperate measures, including selling the national bullion reserves to try to reduce its enormous national debt and meet the criteria for entry to EMU in 1999.

Worse, government ministers have been accused of sleazy financial dealings and tax evasion. The deputy prime minister faced accusations — eventually dismissed by a parliamentary inquiry — of having sex with under-aged boys. A regional minister has had to resign while investigations into similar allegations continue.

A former regional minister is in prison on charges of conspiring to assassinate the former deputy prime minister; other former ministers face corruption trials over arms deals.

But looming above all else has been the discovery of a paedophile ring in the southern city of Charleroi.

The arrest in August of Marc Dutroux, a 39-year-old builder and convicted paedophile, and the discovery of the bodies of four abducted girls buried in the gardens of his homes around Charleroi, exposed a dismal web of police incompetence and judicial negligence.

The revelation that he had allowed two eight-year-old girls, Julie Lejeune and Melissa Russo, to starve to death in a dungeon in the basement of one of his houses was swiftly followed by the admission that police had searched the property three times while the girls were alive and even heard children's voices but had not found them.

Outrage increased when it emerged that Dutroux had earlier been released after serving three years of a 13-year sentence for rape and abduction. The then minister of justice let him out against advice; the authorities did not supervise him after his release; and, when the abductions started, the police failed to investigate the known paedophile on their patch properly.

Little wonder therefore that King Albert's message was grim: "Christmas is traditionally a time of family happiness but this year we all still have in our hearts a deep wound that will not heal. The faces of Julie and Melissa ... and other missing children are engraved on our memories. This national tragedy continues to distress us deeply. We did not think such things could happen here, but it is the cruel truth. We must make sure they can never happen again."

The paedophile scandal crystallised a growing realisation that one of the qualities on which Belgians have prided themselves — to keep their linguistically divided country together — the elevation of compromise to an art form — has failed.

The division of spoils between the parties and the use of political patronage in all public appointments, including the police and judiciary, have created an entrenched system which has thrived on petty corruption, with little need to respond to public pressure.

Fragile Pope cuts back Christmas engagements

Pontiff includes Rwanda, Burundi and atheists in his goodwill prayers. **John Hooper in Rome reports**

THE POPE'S advancing age and increased frailty were again underlined at Christmas as his programme of engagements was severely reduced at the insistence of his doctors.

The 78-year-old pontiff, who left hospital in October after an operation for the removal of his appendix, said mid-night mass in the first hour of Christmas day at St Peter's basilica and delivered his traditional greetings from the balcony of the vast edifice later, at midday.

But he took no part in the Christmas morning mass which is a key event in the Roman Catholic liturgical calendar.

In an unusual gesture, he

included atheists in his messages of goodwill, telling the congregation of tens of thousands, which packed into St Peter's for midnight mass: "We pray for everyone today, Christians and non-Christians, believers and non-believers alike."

The service also made topical reference to worldwide concern about paedophile abuse. It included a succession of prayers, read in a number of languages by men and women from different countries.

But he took no part in the Christmas morning mass which is a key event in the Roman Catholic liturgical calendar.

In an unusual gesture, he

been a favourite destination of sex tourists.

Dwarfed by Bernini's towering altar canopy, the Baldachin, Pope John Paul looked all the more fragile during the stamina-sapping service which lasts an hour and 45 minutes.

On a couple of occasions he rocked backwards and forwards precariously on his heels as he stood in prayer, and the Master of Pontifical Liturgical Celebrations, the grey-haired Monsignor Piero Martin, stepped up to his aid.

But the Pope's voice was strong, and all the more so after he had rested in preparation for the delivery of his message *Urbi et Orbi* (to the city and the world).

This was a particularly important test as the latest round of alarms over the Pope's health began a year ago when, in front of millions of television viewers around the world, he cut short his Christmas greetings and stepped back off the balcony in evident distress.

This year there were no such dramas, but a chair had been placed beside him.

He used this address, his most widely heard of the year, to call for peace, particularly in the Great Lakes region of Africa. A tragedy was unfolding amid the "general indifference of the international community," the Pope said.

"Thousands and thousands of people — our brothers, our sisters — are wandering, prey to fear, illness and hunger, unable to experience the joy of Christmas," he said. No one could truly enjoy Christ-

mas while "this tragedy, this scandal" continued.

The Pope included greetings spoken in the languages of Burundi and Rwanda among those in which he wished the world a happy Christmas.

In an apparent departure from his prepared text, he said: "Rwanda, Burundi; Rwanda, Burundi. We pray a lot for those two countries."

He was due to leave the Vatican yesterday to spend a long weekend at his country residence in Castelgandolfo, southeast of Rome. His next public engagement is on New Year's Eve.



The Pope delivers his Urbi et Orbi message from St Peter's on Christmas Day. Last year, ill health forced him to cut short his speech

Having snubbed a Christmas Day pantomime in protest at unfair criticism, England produced a pantomime of their own. Sadly, it failed to raise a single laugh. It must be protested at this juncture that the recklessness of the England team is seriously undermining the confidence of the media.

Sport96 cover story

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News in brief

Turkey quizzes police officers

Turkey's interior minister, Meral Aksener, has suspended seven police officers over their alleged links with organised crime, the ministry said yesterday.

The seven, from units in central and southern Turkey, are being questioned about claims that they made no effort to arrest a gangster, Mehmet Ozcan, and that they aided and abetted convicted criminals. — Reuters.

Prison transfer

A Pakistan court yesterday transferred Asif Ali Zardari, ousted prime minister Benazir Bhutto's husband, to jail from police custody after he complained of "mental torture" by police. An accused person held in jail cannot be interrogated, legal sources said. — Reuters.

Algiers bomb

A car bomb exploded near a police station in a crowded area of Algiers yesterday, killing at least seven people and wounding at least 70 others, French state radio reported. — AP.

Troops move in

Hundreds of Indonesian troops moved into the town of Tasikmalaya in western Java yesterday after an estimated 5,000 rioters, incensed by reports that police had beaten a religious teacher and two students, set fire to commercial buildings and churches, residents and military officials said. — Reuters.

King Fahd libel

A Beirut court yesterday sentenced the owner of pro-Libyan weekly magazine Al-Kifah al-Arabi and its director to 60 days each in jail for libelling Saudi Arabia's King Fahd, judicial sources said. They were each also fined \$200,000. — Reuters.

Li Peng in Russia

The Chinese prime minister, Li Peng, arrived in Russia yesterday for a meeting today with President Yeltsin. — AP.

Army blamed

Burundi's defence ministry has ordered the arrest of an army officer after deciding an army unit was responsible for clashes in Kizuka earlier this month in which 79 civilians were killed, an army spokesman said yesterday. — Reuters.

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Frankfurt church blast

Suicide bomber 'was mentally ill'

Denis Staunton in Berlin

THE suicide bomber who killed herself and two others in a Frankfurt church on Christmas Eve was a 49-year-old woman who had been receiving psychiatric treatment, German police said yesterday. Thirteen people were injured when two grenades strapped to the woman's abdomen exploded during a midnight service at a Protestant church in the working-class district of Sindlingen. Police believe the woman's motive for the act was personal rather than political or religious, and that she had not intended to kill anyone apart from herself. They dismissed a suggestion made by a Berlin radio station that she had been inspired by a film shown recently on German television in which a hostage-taker causes an explosion in a church. Police are still investigating how she acquired the two Eastern European-made gre-

nades that caused the explosion. "She completely underestimated the effect of the hand grenades," a police spokesman said. The woman, who looked younger than her 49 years and had long, dark hair and blue eyes, was identified after police released a photograph of her severed head. She had been separated from her husband and nine-year-old daughter for a year and under psychiatric supervision for a number of years. Police did not release her name, but said she had originally come from a district near Sindlingen and had lived on the other side of Frankfurt for the past year. The woman arrived at the church by public transport and slipped into a pew near the back shortly after the service began. Some worshippers noticed she continued to wear a heavy winter cape inside the church and that her face was partly concealed by a scarf. As the congregation began to sing a Christmas hymn, they heard a dull bang and

saw pieces of shrapnel and human flesh flying through the air. Many ran screaming from the church and, within minutes, dozens of ambulances and fire trucks converged on the scene. The church's pastor, who is due to retire next week, and worshippers were treated for shock. Two elderly sisters seated next to the bomber were killed instantly by the blast and a 12-year-old girl was among those taken to hospital. The girl's condition stabilised yesterday but her mother remains critically ill. Mourners gathered yesterday at the little stone church to pray for the dead and injured. Small candles burnt next to bunches of flowers left by well-wishers outside the church and a hand-written notice announced the special memorial service. "Christmas has brought us more questions than answers this year. We have injuries among us in body and spirit. But the injuries among us will bind us together," Reverend Bernd Wangerin said.



Mourners light candles outside the Frankfurt church where three people were killed on Christmas Eve

PHOTOGRAPH: AXEL SEIDEMANN

Irish magic fails to do the trick back home

In the first report of two, John Palmer looks at Dublin's legacy for the new EU presidency

inferiority complex is fast disappearing. Ireland is expected to overtake the per capita income of Britain by the end of the decade. It will almost certainly qualify to join the first wave of countries into monetary union in 1999, whatever the British decide to do.

IF THE plaudits of its European Union partners could be converted into votes at home, the Irish government would be facing the political future with confidence. Ireland will hand over the EU presidency to the Netherlands on New Year's Day to warm tributes from the rest of the EU, but John Bruton's coalition, beset by domestic political scandals, faces defeat at the polls next year. There was a time when international acclaim for Ireland's running of the EU presidency impressed Irish voters. But in a country confident enough now to tread the prospect of yet another Eurovision song contest triumph, domestic political popularity is harder to come by. The praise showered on the Irish government's handling of the EU's complex, and at times explosive, affairs has come from Europhile and Eurosceptic alike. "I truly believe the Irish presidency was of exceptional quality," John Major declared after the Dublin EU summit this month. Bonn, Rome, Stockholm, even Paris, echoed the sentiments. The six-month Irish presidency was simply keeping the show on the road. Given the tensions generated both by the planned move to a single currency in 1999 and by the acrimonious debate about a new EU treaty, this was no simple matter. But the Irish have pushed both projects forward at a pace which has satisfied most European integrationists, while averting a premature crisis within the divided British government. That international praise now so unmoves the Irish electorate reflects in part the fact that the country is riding an exceptional economic wave, enjoying the fastest rate of growth in western Europe. Its industrial boom is transforming Ireland's social landscape. There is a downside — not least a burgeoning crime rate — but any lingering national

For us progress in meeting the Maastricht criteria for the single currency has clearly been shown to be the best way to generate growth and jobs. Our record deserves close study by others," the Labour finance minister, Ruairi Quinn, said. Little wonder that a new generation of young Irish Europeans — as most see themselves — is confident about its place in the world. There is even genuine sympathy for the plight of the British, seen across the Irish Sea as being locked into a European spiral of intervention and decline. The Irish presidency draft treaty on monetary union has been accepted by all 15 states as the only practical basis for concluding the Maastricht treaty review negotiations. Some key reforms, such as the greater use of majority voting, will have to be dealt with by the Dutch presidency, but in areas such as immigration, frontier controls and the fight against international crime, the draft treaty clearly nudges the EU further down the road of sovereignty-sharing and political union. Ireland brokered crucial agreements on a single-currency stability pact, on the legal status of the proposed euro and on a new exchange rate mechanism. The Dutch will tie up the legal details, but EMU is going to happen thanks to the Irish. The Irish presidency also defused — at least temporarily — bitter rows about financing policy and the BSE crisis. Managing the EU's affairs and giving a lead on Europe's expanding foreign policy role have stretched the Irish government's resources to the limit. The Irish foreign minister, Dick Spring, who spearheaded the Irish presidency, knows the easy part is over. Far more difficult will be to rally his Labour Party's disaffected voters and an increasingly beleaguered coalition before the general election. Next: Prospects for the Dutch EU presidency

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طوبى من الاموال

The issues

South Korea's trade unions fear the country's new labour law will lead to huge lay-offs, while businesses say flexibility is needed to compete against foreign companies.

The new law:

- Gives businesses greater freedom to lay off workers and set working hours. Currently, a supreme court ruling is needed before companies can cut their work force.
● Bans formation of new umbrella trade union federations until 2000.
● Lifts the ban on multiple trade unions at a work site, but not until 2000.
● Allows teachers to form unions — in two years.



South Korean workers lock themselves in a make-shift cell during a protest in Seoul yesterday PHOTOGRAPH: APH YOUNG-JOON

Nationwide protests paralyse car industry giants

New laws trigger S Korean strike

Sang-hun Choo in Seoul

TENS of thousands of South Korean workers went on strike yesterday to protest against a new labour law passed in a secret early morning vote by ruling party MPs, without any opposition members present.
By yesterday afternoon, 150,000 workers from 82 sites had joined the country's first organised national strike, bringing the country's car industry — South Korea is the world's sixth largest car producer — to a standstill.
The Federation of Democratic Unions, the outlawed umbrella group that called the strike, said 270,000 workers from a further 200 sites will join by the weekend. The Federation of Korea Trade Unions said it would also ask its 1 million members to stage strikes and rallies.
The new law, passed at the same session yesterday, was attended by only 185 ruling party MPs. It makes it easier for companies to lay off employees and bans the formation of two unions at any work place until 2002. It also bans the formation of new umbrella labour groups until 2000, contrary to union demands.

Another bill increased the powers of South Korea's chief spy agency, a move that opposition MPs fear could be used to stifle political dissent. Both bills were passed in seven minutes, with no debate.
Yesterday's strike closed many leading export plants, including South Korea's top car maker, Hyundai, and the world's largest shipyard, Hyundai Heavy Industries. Thousands of workers at three other big car plants also left their jobs.
Workers at South Korea's second largest shipyard, Daewoo Shipbuilding and Heavy Machinery, said they would strike today. The union of Seoul's subway workers will join the strike tomorrow.
About 20,000 Hyundai workers held a rally in Ulsan, 186 miles southeast of Seoul, burning an effigy of President Kim Young-sam and shouting: "Abolish the evil law".
Stung by the swift, secretive session, opposition MPs vowed a prolonged political confrontation. About 100 held a sit-in at the National Assembly, wearing black ties to signify what they called the death of parliamentary democracy. Opposition parties condemned the pre-dawn session as a "coup d'état" by a civilian government.

Kwon Young-Gil, chief of the Federation of Democratic Unions, and several other union leaders have shaved their heads in protest at the laws and have begun a hunger strike in a tent pitched in the grounds of Seoul's Myungdong Cathedral. They said a big protest rally would be held at the weekend.
A nationwide strike would be a further blow to South Korea's ailing economy, which is expected to register a record \$12.6 billion trade deficit this year, twice that of last year. Stock prices have plunged to the lowest level in three years.
South Korean car companies produce 10,000 cars a day, 4,000 of which are destined for overseas markets. The ruling party said it had to act unilaterally because opposition MPs, who do not have enough votes to stop the bills from becoming law, had blocked the assembly from convening last week.
The New Korea Party controls 157 seats in the 299-member unicameral National Assembly. Political instability during the transition from military dictatorship to democracy in the late 1980s spilled over into spontaneous labour unrest, crippling many South Korean car plants. — AP.

Jail term brings 'sky rage' man down to earth

Richard Thomas in Washington

A MAN who assaulted an air steward in a fit of "sky rage" has been jailed for four years, in a case reflecting airline concerns that violent or abusive passenger behaviour is on the rise.
"This is a wake-up call," said Dan Drake, a spokesman for the United States attorney's office in Savannah, Georgia, where the trial was held. "If people continue to do this kind of thing on airplanes, they will be looking at stiff sentences."
Flight staff unions, which have conducted a month-long campaign to highlight the dangers faced by cabin crews, welcomed the tough sentence handed down to Gary Longue, aged 40.
Jane Goodman, from the Association of Professional Flight Attendants, said the strict sentence "shows that tolerance for this kind of behaviour is becoming slimmer as it should".
An intoxicated Longue shoved the chief stewardess on a USAir flight from Savannah to Charlotte against a cabin door after being refused more drink, the court heard. He was also ordered to pay the airline for the cost of turning the plane round to hand him over to police.
Campaigners said the case highlights the increase in sky rage cases, fuelled by busier airports and aircraft and the limited booze at high altitude.

"Most passengers don't realise that one drink counts as two up there," said Ms Goodman. In another case, a drunken passenger attacked a steward because the steaks had run out.
The British aviation industry is pushing for greater legal controls over behaviour in international airspace.
David Stempier, a Washington-based passengers' lawyer, blames cut-backs by cost-conscious carriers to in-flight meals, which make for empty stomachs.
On at least two airlines — American and Alaska — cabin crew are equipped with plastic handcuffs to restrain excitable customers. More serious than the danger to attendants is the potential threat to the planes. Drunken passengers have looked for emergency exits, according to the union Cabin Crew 89.
Peter North, at the British Airlines Representatives, said: "In one sense we've been lucky. No one has opened an emergency door at 30,000ft and downed an aircraft. But something could happen, and a plane could be lost."
In the US a number of high-profile cases have led to tougher prosecutions by government lawyers. Last autumn, on a United Airlines flight from Buenos Aires to New York, a wealthy investment banker, Gerard Finme, ran amok in the presence of the president of Portugal and the Argentinian foreign minister, pouring drink over himself and attacking on the business class drinks trolley.

UN pact to tackle spread of deserts

Owen Bennett Jones in Geneva

AN international agreement designed to reverse the desertification of arid land after two decades of deterioration became legally binding yesterday.
"In many countries the productivity of the soil is rapidly diminishing," said Arbo Diallo, of the secretariat for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. "People have to cultivate more and more to get less and less of a harvest."
The UN estimates that desertification threatens food and water shortages for more than 250 million people living on surrounding arid or semi-arid land.
Robert Ryan, a former diplomat who led the United States delegation to the Rio Earth Summit, said many of those who asked about living on drylands in countries such as Chad and Burkina Faso have had to abandon traditional lifestyles.
Biodiversity is also threatened: drylands provide habitats for wildlife and are estimated to supply the ingredients for a third of the plant-derived drugs on the US market.

Historically, drylands have recovered easily after long droughts, but today a combination of over-cultivation, deforestation and poor irrigation practices has led to economic productivity in some areas that is lost more quickly.
New social trends such as over-population, the decline in nomadic lifestyles, unregulated access to land and refugee crises will also make tackling desertification more difficult.
Developed countries have been reluctant to commit resources, fearing that the problem will be a constant drain on their finances.
Specific measures to stop desertification include introducing drought-resistant crops and encouraging sustainable forestry practices. A successful scheme in Mali handed over public land to specific communities so that they had an interest in improving its productivity.
A Greenpeace activist from Tunisia, Gulzani Hanoum, said the convention lacks resources. "I fear we are not going to solve the desertification problem."
Arbo Diallo said considerable political will is needed but he remains optimistic. "What will the people from west Africa do? Move into France? There is no alternative to tackling this issue."

B&Q SALE advertisement featuring various home improvement products like paint, tools, and lighting with prices and discounts. Includes a large 'SALE' graphic and a quote: 'Great Offers right around the Store.' by Maria Donald.

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Tomorrow: Cleanliness code in the world of chips

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Finance Guardian

Bosses' pay rises fastest

Director-worker gap is 4 per cent wider, says TUC

Alan Jones

THE GAP between the pay of leading directors and their workers has grown by 4 per cent over the past year, a new report showed yesterday.

Gap, claims that Greenbury's efforts, which followed the outcry over "fat cat" salaries, has had no impact in curbing rising differentials between the boardroom and the shop floor.

ends meet. All staff in a company contribute to its performance and while roles clearly differ, interdependence is at the heart of all good working relationships.

12.8 per cent pushed up the rises, while salaries increased by 5.8 per cent. The total average pay of top directors jumped to \$405,000. Salaries averaged \$304,000 excluding bonuses and benefits, according to pay analysts Incomes Data Services (IDS).

over the past two years. Nineteen directors made over \$1 million each from exercising share options this year, says the report.

cut 10,000 jobs. A similar number are at risk from the merger of Lloyds and TSB.

American Notebook
Clinton puzzles over pensions



Mark Tran

ONE OF the sternest challenges facing President Bill Clinton during his second term is what to do with social security, the US's most comprehensive social programme and one of its most successful social experiments.

Nearly all American workers participate in social security, which encompasses public pensions, disability insurance and other benefits. Ninety-six out of 100 paid jobs are covered, and nearly everyone can anticipate drawing social security benefits in one form or another upon retirement.

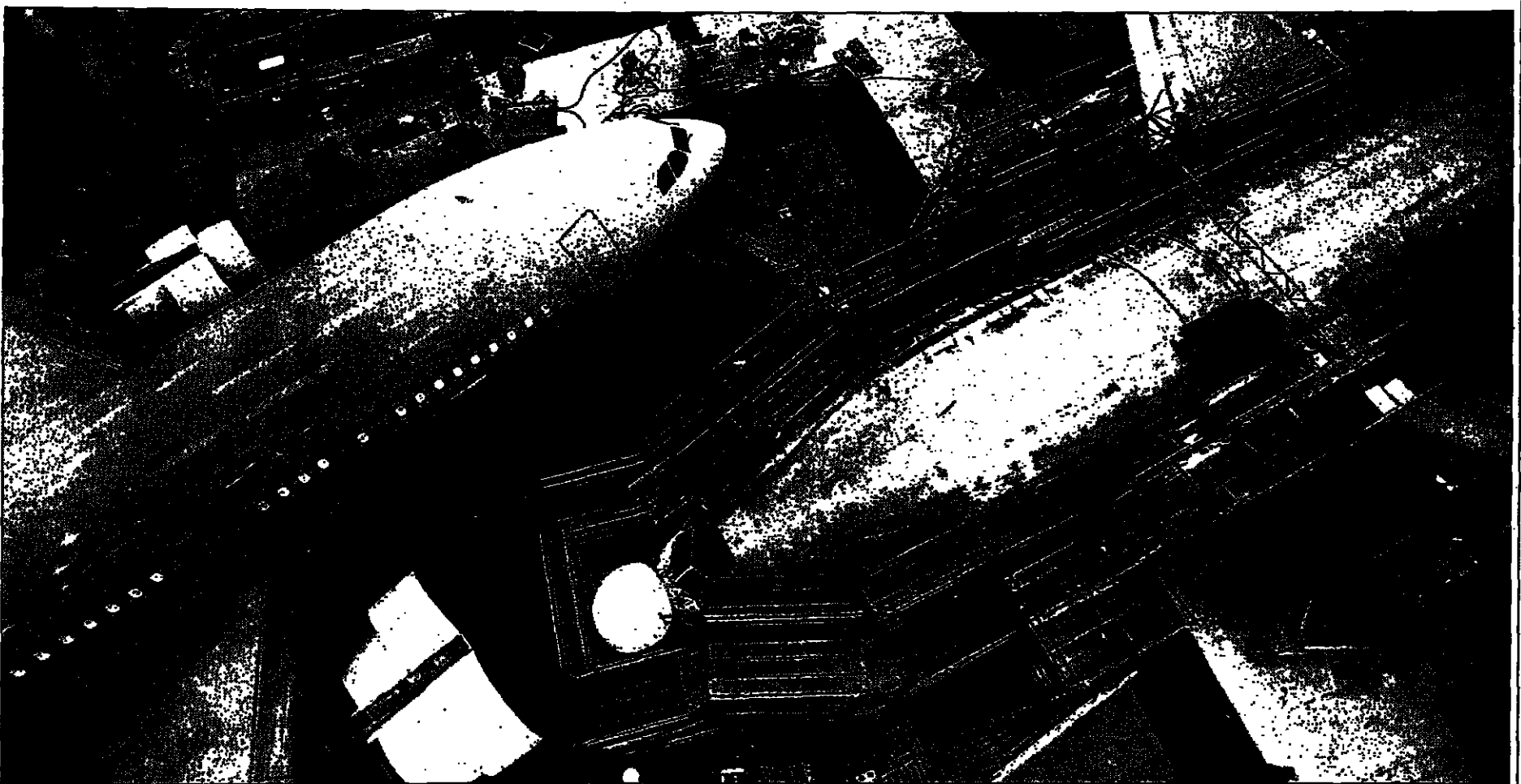
But that spirit of community could fade dramatically if President Clinton adopts a recommendation from some members of an advisory commission appointed in 1994 to look at social security.

The 13-member commission was asked to consider a problem similar to that facing governments in Europe and Japan: that caused by the reduction of the number of workers in proportion to the number of retired people.

In the US, by 2010, three workers will be supporting each beneficiary. By 2020, the system could begin to pay out more than it collects.

THE first plan would allow 40 per cent of trust money to be invested in the stock market, but investments would be managed passively by an independent board to follow some broad index of market performance.

THE REAL PICTURE/Aviation pioneer hopes new international airport will give a lift to beleaguered maintenance division. Photograph: Don McPhee/Words: Geoffrey Gibbs



FROM the earliest days of wood and canvas biplanes, through the production frenzy of the war years to the mould-breaking supersonic achievements of Concorde, Filton has been at the centre of British aircraft production.

On Tuesday Northern dramatically lost its fight to hold off a \$782 million bid from US power company CE Electric. It is the fourth REC to be taken over by a US firm.

lines from as far afield as Egypt and Australia - flown into Filton for heavy servicing work to be carried out.

company has just landed an order to convert a further 10 second-hand A300s for a US leasing company.

in two - the zero engines being coming part of the Rolle-Royce, the aircraft business going on to form part of what became British Aerospace.

been a crucial feature of the site as a whole. Now seriously under-used, it is a hefty overhead for BAe's loss-making maintenance and conversion business.

Predator grabs Northern Electric

Celia Weston Industrial Correspondent

ONLY two of the original 12 privatised regional electricity companies (RECs), Southern and Yorkshire, remain independent, after Northern Electric fell into the hands of an American predator.

On Tuesday Northern dramatically lost its fight to hold off a \$782 million bid from US power company CE Electric. It is the fourth REC to be taken over by a US firm.

Shareholders' leader urges hasty exit from Costain

Tony May

THE board of Costain, the troubled construction group, is in for a rough ride at today's extraordinary general meeting.

Firing powers rejected

Celia Weston Industrial Correspondent

EMPLOYERS have rejected Government plans to create a two-tier system of employment protection by giving small firms greater powers to fire staff.

protection from unfair dismissal could create recruitment problems for small firms and potentially sour relations between management and workers, he said.

the size of firm in which they work." Alternatives to the Government proposal included arbitration and conciliation, Dr Peters said.

Guardian Crossword No 20,845

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down sections.

Set by Crispa

- 21 This could well lead to a wedding (5)
23 Stops open revolt - any way holds off for a time (8)
25 Draw a circle around "taetotal", plainly amused (5)
26 Returning thanks in the evening, having enjoyed dinner? (5)
27 Spiced rope - it's seen as the answer (7)
28 Often drilled out to house a winder (7)
18 Caught the second involved in a racket (7)
20 Learns a new way to produce a magazine (7)
22 Puts up with egghead in the organisation (8-2)
23 Value soft grain (5)
24 Groom about to be committed to prison (5)
1 Tot on health getting confused (7)
2 Fletcher, a man of the church (5)
3 Children dispute (5)
4 Anger with manufacturers of certain clothing (9)
5 A way to show off in flight (5)
6 Continental princess who made her mark? (9)
7 Rose-lover in a flap - his roses are mildewed (5)
8 Far from mean (7)
14 Treating one's soles can bring ease (9)
16 Too much viewing is a mistake (9)
17 Carpeting with cross laid in a cathedral (9)
29 Stuck? Then call our solutions line on 0800 1 313 313. Calls cost 50p per minute Mon-Fri, 6am-9pm, and 45p per minute at all other times. Service supplied by ATIS

Handwritten text at the bottom of the page, possibly a signature or date.